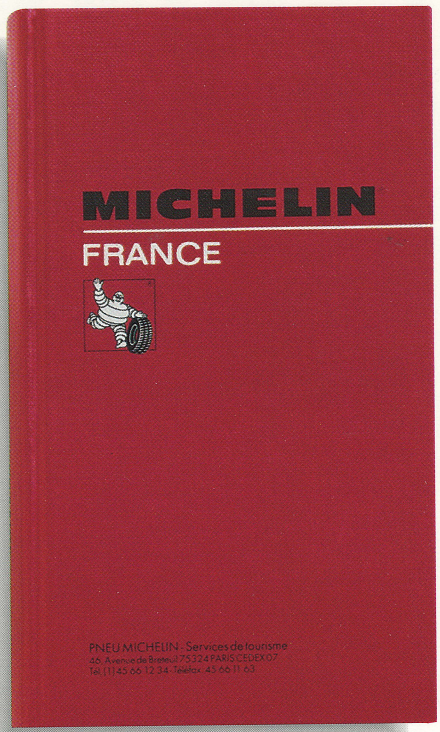
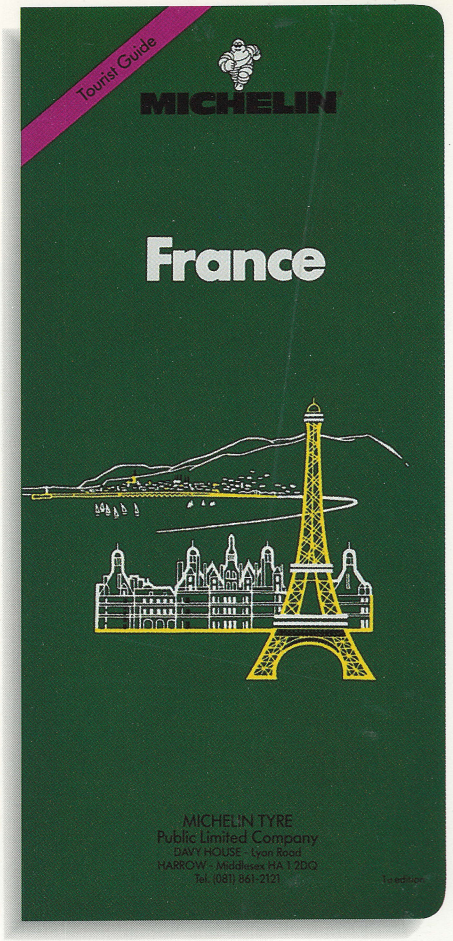

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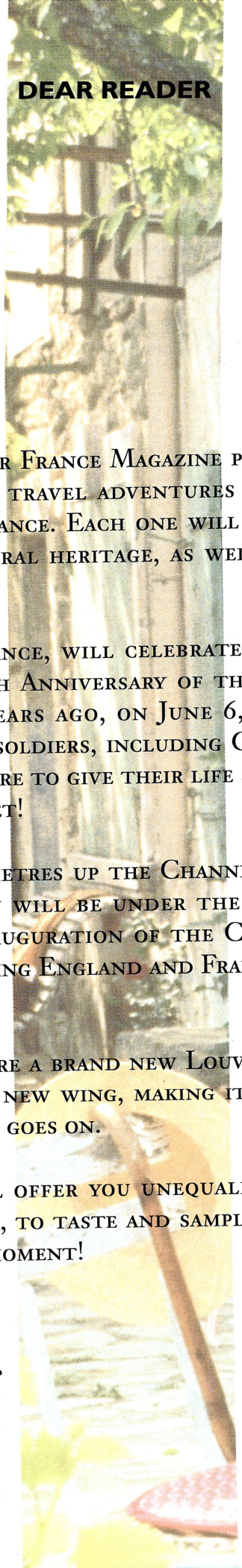


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DEAR READER



THIS ISSUE OF OUR FRANCE MAGAZINE PRESENTS YOU WITH NO LESS THAN FIFTEEN TRAVEL ADVENTURES THROUGHOUT THE VARIOUS REGIONS OF FRANCE. EACH ONE WILL BRING INTO FOCUS HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE, AS WELL AS GASTRONOMY AND SPECIAL EVENTS.

NORMANDY, FOR INSTANCE, WILL CELEBRATE THROUGHOUT SPRING AND SUMMER THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE D-DAY LANDING. IT WAS, INDEED, FIFTY YEARS AGO, ON JUNE 6, 1944, THAT TENS OF THOUSANDS OF ALLIED SOLDIERS, INCLUDING CANADIANS, LANDED ON FRENCH SOIL. MANY WERE TO GIVE THEIR LIFE SO THAT FRANCE COULD BE FREE. LEST WE FORGET!

A FEW HUNDRED KILOMETRES UP THE CHANNEL COAST, THE NORTH-PAS DE CALAIS REGION WILL BE UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT WITH THE MAY 6TH OFFICIAL INAUGURATION OF THE CHUNNEL, THE WORLD'S LONGEST TUNNEL, LINKING ENGLAND AND FRANCE UNDER THE NORTH SEA.

PARIS WILL ALSO FEATURE A BRAND NEW LOUVRE MUSEUM, WITH THE ADDITION OF A WHOLE NEW WING, MAKING IT THE WORLD'S LARGEST MUSEUM. AND THE LIST GOES ON.

IN FACT, FRANCE WILL OFFER YOU UNEQUALLED OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE AND DISCOVER, TO TASTE AND SAMPLE, AND MOST OF ALL TO ENJOY. TREASURE THE MOMENT!

CHRISTIAN LEPAGE
General Manager/Canada
French Government Tourist Office

MAISON DE LA FRANCE

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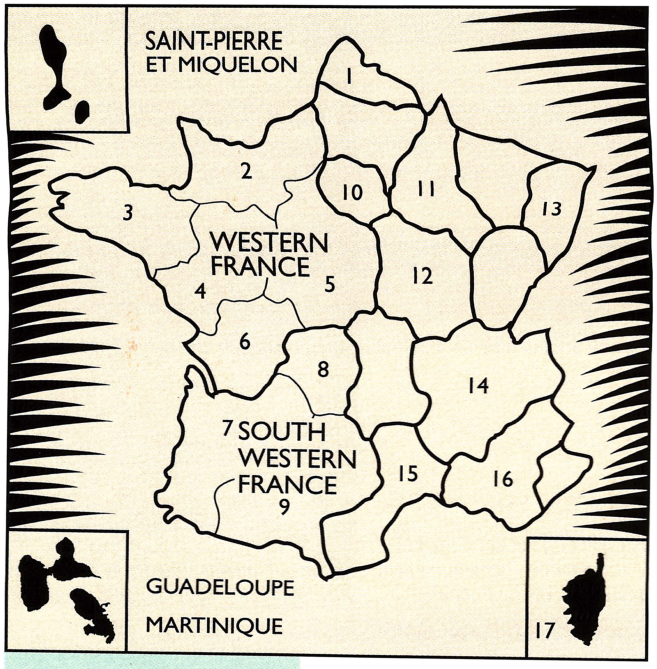
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SOME HELPFUL HINTS



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A valid passport is required for Canadian citizens to enter France.

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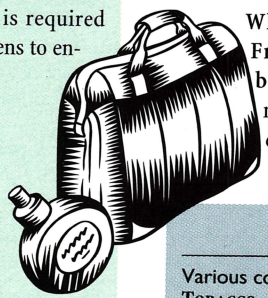
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Banks: Normal bank opening times in Paris are 9 a.m. to noon, 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Closed Saturday and Sunday. In the provinces, banks are usually closed Sunday and Monday. **Automatic cash distributors:** Available at railway stations, airports, and outside banks. **Travellers' cheques:** Often accepted. Easy to exchange in banks.

	EEC	Other Countries	
Various commodities			
Tobacco			
cigarettes (units)	300	200	this amount is doubled
or cigarillos	150	100	if you live outside Europe
or cigars	75	50	
or smoking tobacco (grams)	400	250	
Alcohol			
wine	.5 litre	2 litres	
and either * drinks over 38.8° proof or	1.5 litres	1 litre	
* drinks 38.8° proof or less	3 litres	2 litres	
Perfume	75 g	50 g	
Toilet water	3/8 litre	1/4 litre	
Coffee	1,000 g	500 g	
or coffee extracts	400 g	200 g	
Tea	200 g	100 g	
or tea extracts	80 g	40 g	

Credit cards: They are widely accepted except at small shops (groceries, bakeries, cafés, etc.).

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Many businesses and services are closed on public holidays.

Banks close on the afternoon before a holiday. Holiday closings for museums vary. Contact museums before your visit for specific details.

Bank Holidays
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Bastille Day (August 15)
All Saints Day (November 11)
Christmas and New Year's Day (December 25, January 1)

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Secrets of the North

French is spoken with a distinctly Flemish accent in this border region, whose rich cultural heritage will surprise and delight the unsuspecting visitor.

I ended up staying several days, finding to my great delight that North-Pas de Calais is a fascinating region. The tough and deeply philosophical character of its people forged over centuries of border strife a frontier region embracing land and sea. Its rich history and blend of French and Flemish culture exist nowhere else.



LEAVING THE CHANNEL FERRY AT BOULOGNE HARBOR ONE DAY LAST SUMMER, I WAS SEIZED BY AN IMPULSE TO LINGER AWHILE. HOW MANY TIMES I'D MADE THIS TRIP, JUST CATCHING A GLIMPSE OF NORTHERN FRANCE IN MY HASTE TO REACH PARIS. BUT TODAY THERE WAS NO REASON TO RUSH. I WOULD FIND A HOTEL AND DISCOVER AT LAST WHAT THIS MYSTERIOUS LAND, SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR FROM THE FRENCH CAPITAL, WAS ALL ABOUT.

Boulogne is Europe's largest fishing port. I wandered around the picturesque, cobbled streets of the "Ville Haute" overlooking the port and stopped to admire the Greek vases and Eskimo art at Boulogne's recently revamped Château-Musée. Then I dove into Nausicaa, Boulogne's fabulous National Center of the Sea. On the outskirts of town a statue of Napoleon, high on a column, turns his back to the sea and England, that "perfidious Albion".

Wimereux, Ambleteuse and other small fishing villages beckoned from the chalk cliffs of the Côte d'Opale, which stretches between Boulogne and Calais. From the tip of Cap Gris Nez, I watched the sun set on England, a faint line on the horizon. The coastal plan behind me stretched away into undulating, green pastureland.

Going inland from Calais, I came upon the World War II blockhouse at Eperlecques, where German V2 rockets were launched against London, a reminder that this now peaceful land was a battlefield in two world wars.

The elegant cathedral town of St-Omer in the nearby Audomarois region was built by monks in the 7th century. Its Musée Sandelin was one of those rare finds: an old-fashioned provincial treasure-trove with a fine collection of Delftware.



SPECTACULAR VIEW OF THE CAPES



SMILING CHILDREN OF THE NORTH



WESTMINSTER HOTEL LE TOUQUET

I had arrived in French Flanders, land of limitless horizons of sugar beet and wheat, and small brick farmhouses and pretty canals. At Bergues, a small fortified Flemish town, the towering belfry's merry chimes rang through the main square. In the North-Pas de Calais, I learned, town belfries are a symbol of pride and independence. Southeast of Bergues, near the Belgian border, the Monts de Flandre, a series of gentle, rolling hills, are dotted with windmills. Towns with exotic-sounding names like Wormhout, Hondschoote and Steenwoorde flashed by.

The Moulin de Boeschepe was a wonderful surprise. At the mill's foot I found a typical Flemish pub, or estaminet, where a jovial innkeeper served hunks of brown bread, pâté and cheese, and a delicious locally-brewed beer. "No wine here, this is beer country", he insisted. From the top of the old wooden windmill - built in 1804 - I could see hops growing on their distinctive poles planted teepee-style, and, of course, Belgium within reach of an outstretched hand.

Since they were so close, I decided to explore the Audomarois marshes. At Tilques, I took a boat ride through a portion of the 160 kilometres of waterways that vein the marsh. Reclaimed by the same monks who built St-Omer, parts of this marshland are still under cultivation, producing cauliflower and endive. But the farming population has dwindled and now the marshes attract tourists and other strange birds: gray-backed herons, cormorants and rare aquatic species that have found sanctuary among the reeds and willows here.

Heart of the mining country, the area between St-Omer and Arras is lush and green, home to cattle and the romantic Château d'Olhain, a medieval fortified farm and castle surrounded by a moat. Renowned for its tapestries in the 15th century, the wealthy Burgher city of Arras was heavily bombed during World War I and completely rebuilt. I feared

the worst, so I was happily surprised to drive into a lovely 17th-century colonnaded square whose tall, graceful houses of pink brick and white stone are delightfully coiffed with fanciful gables, in the style I soon came to identify with the region.

The wide, elegant Grand' Place led to the smaller, more intimate Petite Place. It was market day and I wandered around under the square's arcades gazing at the old façades, pausing to watch a housewife haggle in local dialect over a fish she was planning to use in "a waterzoi", a type of local stew. A good-humored cheesemonger talked me into buying a pungent, but delicious, regional Maroilles cheese.

The road between Arras and Cambrai is littered with World War I cemeteries and memorials, moving testimony to the armies which fought here. Vimy, in particular, was most impressive with its Memorial dedicated to fallen Canadian soldiers. At a tiny village called Les Rues-des-Vignes, I picnicked by a canal in the shadow of the semi-ruined 12th-century Cistercian Abbey of Vaucelles. I then visited the Matisse museum, down the road at Le Cateau, near the artist's birthplace, which boasts the third largest collection of the painter's work in France .

Not surprisingly for a border region, the North-Pas de Calais has had many rulers over the centuries - the counts of Flanders, the Hapsburgs, and the Spanish. Louis XIV, in the 17th century, ensured the region became French once and for all. He dispatched his brilliant military architect, Vauban, to fortify many towns. At Le Quesnoy, I had an exhilarating walk around Vauban's defensive battlements laid out in deceptively efficient star patterns, with moats and high, thick walls that glowed in the sunlight. I was to see other examples of Vauban's fortifications but none as beautifully preserved as at Le Quesnoy.

I had saved Lille for last. I worried that this industrial center would have little to offer a tourist. A walk around the old town dispelled my doubts. I was dazzled by a kaleidoscope of rich architectural styles. The wonderfully baroque 17th-century Bourse, on the main square, now home to a flower market, was getting a face lift. In the warren of tortuous streets that fan out from the square, narrow townhouses with colorful façades offer a riot of stucco decorations.

Lille, I found, has everything: fine museums, theatres, opera, great food and terrific shopping. Its sidewalks hum with activity, and the electrifying energy is palpable. While lunching outdoors at the Art Deco Brasserie André, I decided that Lille is essentially a southern town. The perfect place to wind up a tour of the far-from-chilly North!





CANAL CRUISING

THE MAIN SQUARE IN ARRAS



WINDSURFING ON THE BEACH

The coasts of England and France are only 22 miles apart. With the inauguration (in May) this year, of the Channel Tunnel, known as the Chunnel, across-Channel neighbours, Kent and North-Pas de Calais, are developing the concept of Région Transmanche as a single holiday destination. Within easy travelling distance of every major European gateway, the not-to-be missed treasures offered on both sides of the English Channel will be more accessible than ever.

Text: Alice Brinton





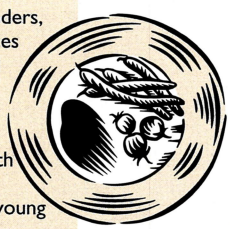
FISHING - ONE OF THE MAIN ACTIVITIES IN BOULOGNE

THE FLAVOR OF REGIONAL CUISINE

The Gourmet's Corner

Beer
Northern France is a land for beer lovers. For many centuries, the brewers have maintained a quality which satisfies the requirements of the true connoisseur. Brown ale is stronger and with a higher alcoholic strength than light ale.

Chicory
The North region (Flanders, Artois, Picardy) produces excellent chicory called "endive" in France.



Bêtises de Cambrai
Bêtises de Cambrai, with its fine refreshing mint flavor, pleases old and young alike.

Boulettes d'Avesnes, Maroilles
These two cheeses, made from cow's milk, are creamy and full-flavored.
Boulettes d'Avesnes is pear-shaped. Maroilles, square in shape, with a russet rind, has a strong flavor.



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HONFLEUR - OLD CITY AND HARBOUR

IDYLLIC NORMANDY, THOUGH IT HAS SEEN MUCH CONFLICT, ENCHANTS ART-LOVERS TODAY JUST AS IT DID THE EARLY IMPRESSIONISTS.

FROM A MOUTH-LIKE SLIT IN THE MENACING BULK OF A SQUAT GERMAN OBSERVATION POST, I LOOKED ACROSS BEETLING CLIFFS TO THE METALLIC-BLUE WATERS OF THE ENGLISH CHANNEL. A MORNING BREEZE BLEW CHILL; THE EARTH SLEPT.

THEN THE SEAS SWELLED, THE SKY GREW STEELY AND OVERCAST. I STARED OUT UPON THOUSANDS OF SHIPS SAILING TOWARD THE COAST: THE VESSELS OF THE GREATEST ARMADA THE WORLD HAS EVER WITNESSED. BUT WAIT! THAT HAPPENED 50 YEARS AGO, JUNE 6, 1944! I MUST HAVE STEPPED INTO THE TWILIGHT ZONE. IT'S ONLY A 60-MILE DRIVE BETWEEN STE-MERE-ÉGLISE IN WESTERN NORMANDY AND CAEN IN CENTRAL CALVADOS. ACROSS THE RICH LANDSCAPE, GRASS GROWS A LUMINOUS GREEN, MUNCHED BY FAT, CREAMY-BROWN NORMAN COWS AND BLOODED HORSES. EVERYTHING SUGGESTS COMFORT, EASE, GOOD LIVING - PEACE.

THIS EXQUISITE LAND, SO FULL OF COLOR AND ATMOSPHERE, IS THE SAME THAT ATTRACTED PAINTERS, AWED BY ITS ETHEREAL LIGHT. HUET, DAUBIGNY AND COROT CAME FROM PARIS, AND BOUDIN, A NATIVE OF HONFLEUR, ENCOURAGED THE YOUNG MONET TO GIVE UP CARICATURE FOR PAINTING. FROM 1862 TO 1869 THE NORMAN COAST HELD IMPRESSIONISM'S HEART AND SOUL, BUT AFTER THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR ONLY MONET RETURNED TO NORMANDY, MAKING HIS HOME AT GIVERNY.

Everywhere, the stormy past is still eerily present. Inland, in once war-torn towns such as Ste-Mère-Église, Bayeux and - above all - Caen (which was 66 percent destroyed during the battles following D-Day), museums have sprung up like poppies, illustrating the horrors of war and our hopes for peace.

The cliffs and fields above and behind the landing beaches of D-Day (Jour-J in French) - Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword - are studded with the remains of wicked weapons: artillery batteries, blockhouses, tanks, half-tracks, pill-boxes, cannons. They are blank and useless now. Children on holiday climb and clamber over them, careless of the pitiless past.

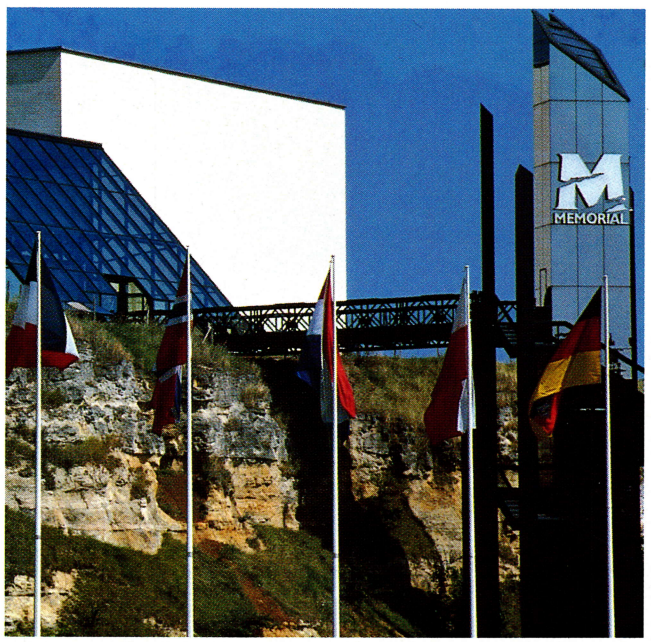
Then there are the cemeteries with their glistening white Latin crosses and stars of David where rest the dead soldiers of Nazi Germany and 12 allied nations: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, New Zealand, Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Norway, Poland and the Netherlands.

At twilight, taps sound over the manicured grounds of the Normandy American Cemetery above Omaha Beach where 9,386 Americans lie forever, among them, four women, a father and son, and 33 sets of brothers. The crowds ebb, quietly, away.

Our look back in reverence begins best in Caen at The Memorial: A Museum for Peace. Opened June 6, 1988, it is physically and spiritually a work of art. The films leave no eyes dry.



COLLEVILLE MILITARY CEMETERY



CAEN MEMORIAL

Essential to an understanding of D-Day events are American Philippe Jutras's Airborne Museum in Ste-Mère-Église, where a parachute still hangs on the village church tower, recalling soldiers trapped in darkness during the "drops" of June 5-6; the Landing Museum, in a former blockhouse at Utah Beach; and the Memorial Museum of the Battle of Normandy in Bayeux (uniforms, arms, equipment, a fine film, dioramas).

Especially fascinating are the Museum of Undersea Wrecks at Port-en-Bessin, on the coast east of Omaha Beach, and the Landing Museum at Arromanches.

The first is unique in the world, displaying tanks, plane parts, weapons, personal items such as cameras, binoculars, razors, combs, and even letters salvaged from the sea. A film, featuring diver Jacques Lemonchois (the museum's creator) at work underwater, is an introduction to this extraordinary collection.

The construction of colossal offshore ports (called Mulberries) to supply the invading forces is a major subject of the Landing Museum. Built almost entirely in the United Kingdom and then towed across the Channel, these concrete monsters formed a port larger than that of Dover. Moving models illustrate the all-but-incredible engineering achievement.

Celebrations for the 50th anniversary of D-Day

50th

03/03-04/04	Historical International Symposium, Caen
01/04-30/04	Presentation of the film "Hope", Memorial of Caen
03/04-04/04	Jumping for Peace, Horse Show, Caen
30/04-04/09	Flower Show of Peace, Caen
06/05-07/06	War Correspondant Prize, Bayeux
01/06-30/09	Images of the Liberation of Paris, Hôtel de Ville, Paris
04/06	Presentation of Medals, Ste-Mère-Église
05/06	Wreath-laying for the 1st Canadian Para, Toufferville
06/06	D-Day Celebrations in presence of Heads of States.



GIVERNY - MONET'S GARDEN

MONT SAINT-MICHEL AT LOW TIDE

One of the treasures of French history is the Bayeux Tapestry (La Tapisserie de la Reine Mathilde), really an enormous embroidery, the liveliest document to survive the Middle Ages. It tells, in delightful detail, the story of William the Conqueror's invasion of England in 1066, and is traditionally thought to be the work of William's wife, Mathilda, and the ladies of her court.

War is not all. Normandy is a province rich in art and architecture of the Medieval, Gothic and Renaissance periods; literature and handicrafts; excellent hotels and inns; lovely and varied scenery, from rugged seascapes to pastoral vistas, bustling towns to quaint fishing villages; and good things to eat and drink.

Bayeux itself is a delicious small city; don't skip a stroll through its old streets by night. In Caen, pay your respects to William the Conqueror at his tomb in the Abbey for Men, which he commissioned, and to his wife, Queen Mathilda, in the stunning Abbey for Women. The Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Musée de Normandie in the château also are worthwhile.

While the Romantic artists of the 19th century were discovering inland Normandy, younger painters sought the variations of light over the seascapes of the Norman coast near Deauville, Trouville and Honfleur. Here they gave birth to Impressionism, meeting often to "plot" their artistic revolution at the St-Siméon Inn in Honfleur. Such a perfect stage set that everyone with a camera imagines himself a photo-Impressionist.

The light and color conspire to keep you outside, but do visit the interior of the Musée Eugène Boudin, devoted to painters of Honfleur and the Seine Estuary. And certainly no traveller should bypass smart Deauville, just a few minutes southwest of Honfleur, center of horse racing and home to perhaps the world's most elegant casino.

From Honfleur, cross the Seine and cut north to Etretat, an old sea resort, with its dramatic coastal cliffs. A few miles farther north, you come to Fécamp with its Bénédictine Palace, housing the distillery of the famous liqueur and a glorious collection of medieval art and sculpture.

From Fécamp, drive southeast to Rouen, where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. It's a city for all interests. Art enthusiasts will go first to the Musée des Beaux-Arts, with masterpieces by the French 17th to 19th-century schools, as well as the Italian, Flemish and Dutch masters. Focus is placed on Géricault and the Impressionists. Next stop: the house of Joan of Arc and the Musée des Antiquités. Then, dinner at one of the city's many fine restaurants (if you like duck, try the canard à la rouennaise).

Southeast of Rouen, you'll find two treasure chests of Impressionism in the hamlet of Giverny (pop. 548): the Musée Claude Monet (his home and gardens) and the Musée Américain, displaying works of American artists who followed the French Impressionists to Giverny and the Seine Valley.

Text: Georgia I. Hesse



REGIONAL CUISINE



OLD HOUSES IN ROUEN



The Gourmet's Corner

Normandy cooking is simple and straightforward and food is plentiful and wholesome. Things retain their natural flavor: butter and cream are extensively used and are served with a great many of the dishes. The cheeses - Neufchâtel, Pont-l'Evêque, Livarot, or Pavé d'Auge - are among the most delectable in France; not to speak of the world-famous Camembert, which first made its appearance at the beginning of the last century. Cider, sweet or dry, still or sparkling, is served with everything. As for Calvados, or cider-brandy, it will not only serve to lace or chase your after-dinner coffee, but will revive a dulled appetite in the middle of a copious meal.

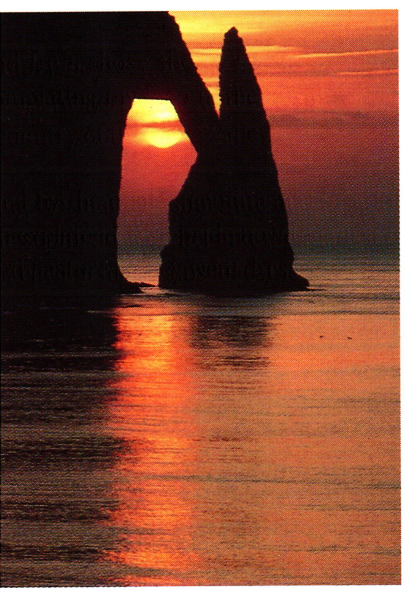
Some specialities
Chitterlings sausage (Vire); black sausage à la normande, or grilled, with potatoes (Mortagne); omelettes (Mont-Saint-Michel); braised tripe (Caen), oysters and other sea-fruit (Normandy coast); sole dieppoise; salt-marsh mutton; chicken Vallée d'Auge; duck à la rouennaise (cooked whole); baked apple and pear dumplings; sugar candy (Rouen); caramels (Isigny), and Benedictine (Fécamp).



MICHELIN®
MAPS AND GUIDES



THE TURRETS OF CHAMBORD
LOIRE VALLEY



ÉTRETAT
NORMANDY



THE POITEVIN MARSH
POITOU-CHARENTES

WESTERN FRANCE

In Western France, the farmer and the chef alike cannot help but draw inspiration from Mother Nature's endless, ever-changing personality.

Setting out with no preconceived notions, I discovered that the taste of this immense region we call Western France is the best of everything as simply as nature intended it. It's in an icy cold and dripping fine de claire plucked fresh from the Marennes oyster beds and tossed back with a crisp splash of Muscadet. I saw it shimmering in a golden cognac and sniffed it in the perfume of calvados. I experienced it in the round shape of a Bretonne crêpe, the fragrant bit of chabichou cheese and the smoke of eels grilling on an open fire in the Poitiers marketplace. I witnessed it when the arrival of fall signaled the start of the hunt near Bracieux and brought the season's first wild deer to the table.

My culinary odyssey began in Normandy and Brittany and from those shores I veered southeast into Western Loire and the sunny Cognac country, completing my loop in the Royal Châteaux country of the Loire Valley.

Travelling Normandy's shoreline and lush hills, I was warmed by the casual, genuine welcome of the sophisticated chef and the modest farmer alike who explained with pride how the elements of each of his menus all came from his own gardens and pastures. They were dressed

A ROYAL

differently, the chef in his toque and the farmer in his "bleu de travail", but these men were quite the kindred culinary spirits. Their cider was always fresh and sparkly, pressed in the fall when Normandy's orchards hang heavy with the ripe, red apples that are the local trademark. The farmer's immensely flavorful veal came from his own glen, and was served with the chef's same fresh dairy cream and apple slices. Somewhere en route, I also enjoyed it cooked in Pommeau, a delicate blend of fresh apple juice and delicious, twice-distilled calvados. Not, however, before I'd been talked into a hearty sampling of andouille de Vire, a local sausage specialty.

I was delighted to find shops and farms selling squares and wheels of Camembert, Livarot, Pont-l'Evêque and Neufchâtel in and around Beuvron-en-Auge, a village of half-timbered Norman cottages. In Fécamp, the Benedictines brewed up the first herb-based brandy and invented the tripes à la mode de Caen in that city's splendid Abbaye aux Hommes.

I found it difficult to plan ahead for a cheese course, or even a dessert made with warm apples, crème fraîche and pâte feuilletée, with the maître Canardier preparing his canard à la Rouennaise, tableside. This was theatre: the silver duck press that extrudes the blood to be used for the sauce; the copper pots hand-forged in the ateliers at Villedieu-les-Poêles, the flash of their tin interiors and the flourish of sharp, steely knife blades. These images travel with me everywhere.

The fresh, salty crevette roses that come daily from the sea to Normandy's postcard-pretty port of Honfleur were a delicious introduction to the wealth of seafood I had been looking forward to finding on bills of fare in neighboring Brittany. The oyster beds around Belon and Cancale provide the best of these craggy crustaceans to Paris tables and those around the region, where they are served cold, as well as warm, with a dot of sauce mousseline and a cap of inky caviar. I also found "huîtres alfresco" in generous supply portside.

"Mmm, cardamom", I thought, surprised as it rolled over my tongue in the sauce for the "homard Breton". But, according to the brilliant young Cancale chef, Olivier Roellinger, "C'est traditionnel!" Spices like curry and cinnamon once arrived regularly at the port at St-Malo from the Orient and were commonplace in the region's dishes for as long as the trade routes were active. Such flavors haven't quite made their way into the legendary galettes, or crêpes, which started out centuries ago as a simple staple of the sturdy Breton people, but even that has been brought into the 20th century. Just about anything goes, ingredient-wise, in both the galette, which is the buckwheat version without sugar, and the sweet crêpe, eaten for dessert. Fresh Breton cider is the only thing to drink with this simple meal - either from a traditional terracotta bollée, or from a loop-handled faïence cup like those made in Quimper, a prosperous city still distinctly Breton in character and full of intriguing churches including the cathedral of St-Corentin, the city's patron saint.



D-DAY MONUMENT - JUNO BEACH NORMANDY

BOUNTY

After visiting the fishing village of Concarneau and, to the south, Pont-Aven, where the painter Gauguin lived and worked, I headed down the coast to La Baule, where the shoreline slopes into the smooth, sandy beach and marshy salt flats of the Pays de la Loire (Western Loire). Lucky for me, it was the one day that month when the tide in this old resort was far, far out, exposing the beds of coques to legions of delighted diggers.

From Nantes, with its many balconied mansions and its busy port, I drove along the coast to Le Croisic, a pretty fishing town whose port is dotted with islands and ringed with 18th-century houses. Here, I had a sumptuous lunch of seabass cooked in its own juice in a crust of sel de Guérande. Ground coarse or fine, this natural sea salt is a delicacy, gathered in late summer from an expansive, windswept grid of pools at the heart of the peninsula.

Near Angers, I feasted on escargots, eels, frogs legs and duck, all of which were served up in a tiny tavern by a jolly proprietor. His mushrooms, the champignons de Paris, came from Saumur, where I visited the troglodytes who cultivate them in caves excavated for the stone used to build the châteaux along the Loire.

I then toured the royal abbey of Fontevraud, built in the 12th century and sprawling over 34 acres. For a time converted for use as a prison (by order of Napoleon), the abbey is now being restored. Louis XV's four youngest daughters were raised here.



BELLE-ÎLE EN MER - THE HARBOUR BRITTANY



LITTLE GIRL WEARING TRADITIONAL HEADDRESS - BRITTANY

Romanesque churches and Renaissance castles are scattered about these river valleys, near villages such as Coudray-Salbart, Sainte-Ouenne, and Mauzé-sur-le-Mignon. I felt free to dip shamelessly into the butter here in the Deux-Sèvres, knowing it is the favorite of the world's best chefs. It comes from piebald cows around Niort, once renowned for its cloth and leather. Sweet cream is churned slowly in special teak vats found only at nearby Echiré.



THE LOIRE RIVER NEAR TOURS - LOIRE VALLEY



GRASLIN THEATRE IN NANTES - WESTERN LOIRE

I followed the chef's suggestion and spread this exquisite butter liberally on my bread with my chabichou, the cheese Rabelais called the best in France. The crottins, bûches, pyramides, St-Paul and Mothais, with wrapping of leaves, are also to be found in this area. In Villemain, I discovered that fresh cheese tastes even better when its flavor is mingled with the sights and sounds and pungent smells of the farm where it's made.

In Cognac country, I felt overwhelmingly that the pride in the prestigious product is matched only by the locals' reverence for the region's verdant, vine-covered hills. I saw all the grand châteaux named for cognac brands that are practically household words, but was just as impressed with the small farmhouses, constructed in a square formation around a central courtyard, and villages like Bourg-Charente, with its historic bridge linking a Renaissance château and a Romanesque church.

Down roads running by 12th-century churches, and behind old wooden doors, I found copper stills and oak barrels handmade locally for cognac and Pineau des Charentes, a sweet aperitif made from grape juice and cognac. It was delicious on the plump, sugary melons that flourish in the area, and in the ris de veau au Pineau des Charentes, a local specialty. The town of Cognac is itself a perfect blend - of modern commerce, as the center of Cognac trade, and medieval architecture.

The famous oysters of Marennes-Oléron also come from this region. I learned to identify these by the greenish color they get from an algae found only in the waters around the Île d'Oléron, some miles south of La Rochelle. The algae imparts the briny tang that I love, and that taught me to eat oysters like an expert: without lemon juice or vinaigrette.

Napoleon's minister, Prince de Talleyrand, was legendary for his hospitality and the parties he gave at the château of Valençay in the Loire Valley. As I stood in the main garden and looked out over the valley, I imagined the guests meandering about before feasting on all that comes from the surrounding forests: deer, rabbit, pheasant and duck. Maybe, I thought, they sipped a bubbly Vouvray or a Vouvray demi-sec from a cave like the one I visited near Tours.

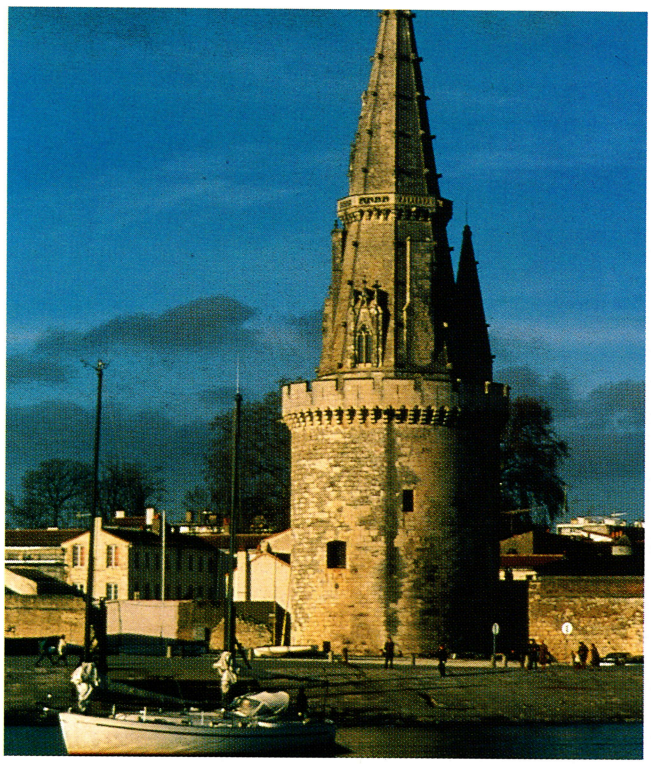
Talleyrand's guests likely felt no less welcome at this glorious château than I did in this region's restaurants and inns, which are often family affairs. It is Mme Robin who welcomes you at chef Bernard Robin's extraordinary Relais de Bracieux near Cheverny. Her suggestion of rabbit prepared with pear and cinnamon was a brillant way to usher in the hunting season that was getting underway outdoors. The region's most famous castles are only a stone's throw away: Chenonceau, Chambord, Blois, Amboise...

It seems traditional in the Loire to have the mistress of the château greet its guests, and it is from that tradition that the Auberge de la Cognette gets its name. Balzac was a frequent guest of the restaurant and hotel in Issoudun, which is now presided over by Alain Nonnet and his wife. Draped in tapestries and exquisite napery, La Cognette shares the same welcoming spirit with colleague, Jean Bardet, located just outside of Tours. Take an aperitif in front of the fire or, in summer, in the shimmering glass pavilion, before asking Mme Bardet to accompany you to your table. The menu here, like many in

the Loire, has a wonderful balance of local fish and game, but chez Bardet, pay special attention to the fruits, vegetables and fragrant herbs. They come right from Jean Bardet's own potager or vegetable garden.

I couldn't join the hunt or putter in the potagers, but in the Loire, I could play the role of the comtesse or princesse. Happily, many châteaux have opened their doors to guests, either as bed and breakfast establishments or as hotels where the accommodations and warm hospitality rival the wonderful food. At the Château du Breuil in Cheverny and the Château d'Esclimont in Chartres, I felt the welcoming tradition of Talleyrand alive around me. I might as well have been royalty.

Text: Claire Wilson



LA ROCHELLE - POITOU-CHARENTES



LES SABLES D'OLONNE - WESTERN LOIRE

The Gourmet's Corner

Vins de Loire and sparkling wines

The name Vins de la Loire applies to all wines produced along the banks of the Loire and its tributaries. The various vineyards produce a wide range of wines; the Loire is the link which gives these very different wines a family resemblance.

The dry, fresh, fruity, fragrant white wines from Sancerre, Reuilly, Pouilly-sur-Loire and Quincy all have a very individual character.

Touraine produces light red wines with a violet or raspberry flavor: Bourgueil, Chinon, Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil, etc., rosés and white wines, such as Vouvray and Montlouis are dry, sweet and sparkling. Finally, the rosés de Loire are very delicate and very dry.

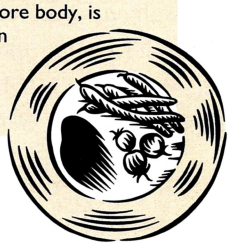
The white or red wines of Anjou and Saumur are of infinite variety. The whites may be dry or sweet. You will also find fruity rosés, both dry and sweet, produced mainly from the Cabernet grape which has given its name to Cabernet d'Anjou and Cabernet de Saumur. Among the whites, Coteaux de Saumur are lighter and drier and preserve their quality well, Coteaux du Layon and Coteaux de l'Aubance, very fine and sweet, are richer and age very well.

A large amount of the production from the Saumur region is made by the Champagne method. These wines are matured in deep cellars hollowed out of the tufa (white porous limestone).

Wines from the Nantes region

Muscadet has conquered France and other countries as well. It is to white wine what Beaujolais is to red wine. Very pale in color, dry without acidity, it is the ideal accompaniment for fish and shellfish.

Muscadet de Sèvre et Maine, is light and pleasantly fruity. Muscadet des Coteaux de la Loire, with more body, is drier and even fruitier.





DELICIOUS MARENNES OYSTERS



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Aquitaine/Midi-Pyrénées/Limousin

There comes a point, driving through the Southwest of France, when you have to throw up your hands and laugh in disbelief. It's just not possible, you think, but there it is - another village more beguiling, another castle more stirring, another landscape more Elysian than the last. Nowhere else have the grandeur of nature and the artistry of man come together in such a happy result, so often in the space of a few hundred kilometres.

A LIVING HISTORY

That point arrived for me near the Dordogne River: first there was a small rushing stream alongside the narrow mountain road. I got out of the car and tried to follow it, lost it in the brush, walked farther out along a bend in the road to try to see the waterfall I could by then hear, and turned around. There it was, deep in a valley beneath wooded chalk cliffs, all russet tile roofs and round turrets with conical hats on pink stone houses - Autoire. It might as well have been Brigadoon.

The old regional names - Gascony, Quercy, Rouergue, Périgord - resonate with the true romance and flavor of this sprawling region. Their boundaries are sometimes hard to grasp, often marked only by subtle distinctions: a change in the color of the roof tiles, or the way hay is baled.

The Southwest is anchored on the diagonal by Bordeaux and Toulouse; between them spreads dramatically beautiful and varied countryside, laced with rivers, pierced by gorges and embroided with surprising and enchanting villages.



FOURCÈS - A TYPICAL CIRCULAR BASTIDE

Among the most appealing of these are the bastides. From the 12th to the 14th centuries, feudal lords created these "new towns" to attract settlers, endowing them with individual plots of land, hunting rights in the surrounding forests and, best of all, the status of free men. In the Middle Ages freedom meant relief from onerous taxes and this was inducement enough to uproot thousands of peasant families, which is why many bastides are called "Villefranche" (free city) or "Villeneuve" (new city).

In the several bastides I visited - among them, Monpazier, with its superb covered market; Monflanquin, with its magnificent panorama and perfectly preserved central square; Navarrenx, on the banks of the Baune River, originally settled in the 11th century - I was struck by how well these communities have preserved their architecture.

They are typically built around a central marketplace framed by arcaded houses (merchants and craftspeople kept their shops in the arcades), with an adjacent church. Houses are of identical dimensions, while the size of the square itself was determined by the bastide's relative importance as a commercial center. The square gridwork of streets fans out from the center of town. More than 300 bastides survive, many absolutely unchanged, strewn in a galaxy across the Southwest.

MIDI-PYRÉNÉES

Toulouse, the "pink city" on the Garonne, is much older than the bastides. It is a marvel of medieval architecture in distinctive rosy-red brick, presided over by the Romanesque Basilica St-Sernin. It is also a boom town, home of Aérospatiale and the Airbus - a flying tradition begun with the first mail flights by legendary pilots like Antoine de St-Exupéry. The shopping streets in the city center disguise splendid Renaissance houses - Toulouse must be seen by looking up to its venerable façades, and looking in to its hidden courtyards.



THE PINK CITY OF TOULOUSE



CHÂTEAU HAUT-BRION - PRIDE OF THE BORDELAIS VINEYARDS

MONTFORT CASTLE



ARMAGNAC - AN EXCEPTIONAL BRANDY

South of Toulouse are the Pyrénées, leading to Spain. Facing their snow-capped crags from the bank of the Ariège River is Foix, the triple towers of its ruined château now a museum of traditional arts and armor. Mirepoix, a 1279 bastide grown into a small town, has the most perfect covered market of them all. Montségur is ominous and beautiful on its wild mountaintop.

Within the walls of St-Bertrand-de-Comminges, the impressive Gothic cathedral overlooks the ruins of the original Roman settlement. High in the Pyrénées, Lourdes draws some 6 million pilgrims a year to its grandiose spired basilica and grotto.

To the west is Gascony, land of foie gras, Armagnac and d'Artagnan, the illustrious fourth musketeer. Based on the very real Charles de Batz (b. 1615), d'Artagnan represents the essential Gascon character - bold, brave, bull-headed, with a taste for adventure and healty appetites. His statue holds forth on the monumental staircase at Auch, whose Gothic cathedral claims the most resplendent Renaissance stained-glass windows in France.

The rolling green farmland of Gascony is honeycombed with bastides: Cologne, with its jaunty, cone-capped, 14th-century covered market; Larressingle, a walled-fortress; Fourcès, Gascony's only circular bastide and one of its most delightful, its tree-filled round square ringed with 13th-century arcaded houses and blossoming flowerpots. Sit at the sidewalk café on this magic circle and drink in "la douceur de vivre" of the Southwest.

Vineyards, among the oldest in France, lead to the spirited, wine-producing town of Gaillac. Nearby Albi is the complete red-brick city, dominated by its overwhelming fortress-cathedral. Overlooking the Tarn River is the gorgeously landscaped Toulouse-Lautrec Museum; housing more than 600 works by the artist (who was born in the old city's center), it is the largest collection of Lautrecs in the world.

Montauban, the first bastide, was founded in 1144. The traditional Saturday morning market is still held in the double-arcaded main square. The Ingres Museum has an exceptional collection of paintings and drawings by the eminent 19th-century artist, Montauban's most famous son.

Lauzerte is one of the most seductive of all bastides, cream-stone houses blanketed in ivy and roses, some half-timbered, some with wonderful mullioned windows. Cordes, in the wooded hills below the Aveyron, is almost everyone's idea of the perfect medieval village, intact within its walls and threaded with cobbled streets of graceful Gothic houses. Farther along, Najac sweeps into view, the castle at the pinnacle of a hill set low in the green bowl of the surrounding cliffs.

Miracles attributed to Ste-Foy, whose relics were kept in an isolated monastery, brought pilgrims and riches to Conques, which explains the grandeur of the 12th-century abbey in this unlikely spot. The church's treasure includes the sumptuous reliquary figure of Ste-Foy herself, gold-plated and studded with precious stones.

East of Conques, the Lot valley widens, its alluvial banks planted with corn and tobacco. The sharp cliffs are peppered with châteaux and small villages, but the undisputed star is St-Cirq-Lapopie, almost too perfectly poised on its hill, now maintained by its resident artisans.

Branching off from the Lot is the bewitching valley of the Célé, lush and green, with ancient houses squeezed between river and rock wall. At Espagnac-Ste-Eulalie you must tour the ruins of the old convent and the church. Marcilhac-sur-Célé is a place like no other, an intriguing encounter with a past all too seemingly alive. The immense, brooding ruins of an 11th-century abbey, broken walls and arches open to the sky, are attached to a dark Gothic church filled with lighted candles and curiosities of all kinds.

Cahors is the capital of Quercy, an agricultural cornucopia crowned by truffles and the heady wines of Cahors and Coteaux de Quercy. The Saturday market in front of the great double-domed cathedral is one of the best in the Southwest. Since the early 12th century, pilgrims have climbed the 216 steps to the candlelit Notre-Dame chapel in the aerie of Rocamadour, to pray before its small, strangely spindly Black Madonna.

AQUITAINE

A rich merchant town, Sarlat-la-Canéda was largely rebuilt in the late 15th century; its golden-hued Renaissance houses have heavy stone roof tiles called lauzes. The center of Black Périgord, Sarlat is famous for its Saturday market - foie gras, truffles, mushrooms, walnuts, ducks and geese. The storybook stained-glass windows of the cathedral, the busy cafés on the Place de la Libération, the cobbled alleys, the enigmatic "Lantern of the Dead" - Sarlat must be savored slowly so as not to miss a single detail. Near Sarlat, stroll through



ST-JEAN DE LUZ HARBOUR

the Eyrignac Gardens, designed by an Italian in the 18th century, with formal, fastidiously pruned yews and boxtrees.

The greatest concentration of important prehistoric sites in France is found along the small roads that spider-web between Sarlat and the Dordogne and Vézère rivers. Les Eyzies-de-Tayac is completely surrounded by caves and grottoes. At Montignac, Lascaux II is an exact duplicate of the renowned painted caves now closed to tourists, a prodigious accomplishment.

The Château de Beynac, a French bastion during the Hundred Years War, looks straight across the Dordogne to Castelnaud, a sometime English stronghold; the view from one to the other brings that stormy century to life as no history book ever could. Domme commands a lordly overlook; its tower gate was once a prison for Templar Knights, who left cryptic graffiti on its walls.

Bergerac, the most important town in the southern Dordogne, is surrounded by pretty villages such as Issigeac and the bastides Eymet and Beaumont-du-Périgord. Perhaps most breathtaking is lovely, arcaded Monpazier, recently chosen as the quintessential bastide village in France.

The château at Biron was built in three sections, in three different centuries. The difference between the smoke-blackened medieval kitchen and the vast 18th-century one speaks volumes. From Biron in the distance you can see Monflanquin; on its main square is the house of Edward, Prince of Wales, son of King Edward III of England, otherwise known the Black Prince because of the color of his armor - and possibly also because he looted and pillaged a black swath through the Black Périgord.

The only place the Black Prince ever reigned was Bordeaux, when it was the capital of the Duchy of Aquitaine. Wealthy from the wine trade since its Roman days, it sits on the banks of the Garonne, a testimony to the genius of French urban renewal in the 18th century. The Place de la Bourse, in the center of the great arc of merchant houses along the river, is a portrait of harmony, mansard roofs and gold-tipped balconies looking out over the bronze fountain of the Three Graces to ships moored along the wharf. The glittering Grand Théâtre and the Cathedral of St-André are each magnificent structures, and the Place du Parlement, in the old town, is an asymmetrical 18th-century jewel.



ARCACHON

Bordeaux is, today, a prosperous city of 600,000 people. Its theatres and conservatories offer a full calendar of musical and dramatic entertainment. Its many museums celebrate a tumultuous past and a rich cultural present. The Aquitaine Museum is a unique and fascinating tour of several centuries of agriculture, shipping and commerce. The Beaux-Arts Museum houses works by Titian, Rubens, Breughel and Delacroix, among other great masters. The Museum of Decorative Arts is a restored 18th-century mansion well-stocked with antique furniture, ceramics, glassware, jewelry and wrought iron. Also not to be missed: The Customs Museum, the Museum of Natural History, the Military Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art.



PÂTÉ AND TRUFFLES

Haut-Médoc, the gravelly left bank of the Gironde, produces the wines of Margaux, St-Julien, Pauillac and St-Estèphe. Along a small, flat road through the vineyards, a château pops into view every few minutes. Château Palmer, with its profusion of pointy towers and flags, looks like a jousting tournament is underway. Château Ducru Beaucaillou might be a well-manicured country club. Cos d'Estournel was modeled after a Sultan's palace. Château Mouton Rothschild, an elegant manor, has an exquisite wine museum.



CHÂTEAU OVERLOOKING THE DORDOGNE

Across the Dordogne, St-Emilion is a village worthy of the illustrious wines from the vineyards that crowd right up its flanks. The subterranean Monolithic Church and its gargantuan pillars were carved whole out of the rock between the 9th and 12th centuries. Strange, this cavernous sanctuary deep underground, beneath such a sunny village

filled with wine shops and sweet-smelling bakeries. But then, St-Emilion was an 8th-century hermit whose original retreat, with stone bed and chair, is the next cave over.

South of Bordeaux lies Arcachon, renowned for its oysters, and beyond the long, unbroken stretch of beaches fringing the Landes, the craggy and spectacular coastline of the Basque Country. This is where France meets the Pyrénées and Spain. Biarritz is its undisputed gem, mirrored closely by St-Jean-de-Luz and Bayonne.



COLLONGES-LA-ROUGE

LIMOUSIN

The Limousin is a country of dense forests and green pastures, of red-gold cows and white sheep grazing in purple heather, of hard-working farmers and horse-breeders and artisans. The word limousine has its origins here: in the 19th century many local men migrated to Paris to become taxi drivers, known for their fine horses and carriages.

Limoges is a capital with two hearts: the old cité, a jumble of medieval streets around the cathedral, overlooking the Vienne River; and the "château" quarter, now the commercial and social center of the modern city. The manufacture of porcelain, synonymous with the city, did not begin until the 1870s, when deposits of the fine clay known as kaolin were discovered in nearby St-Yrieix-la-Perche. The collection at the Adrien Dubouché Museum displays 18th and 19th-century treasures produced by legendary manufacturers - Comte d'Artois, La Seynie, Pouyat, Haviland.

Passing by the beautifully furnished Château de Montbrun, a dwelling suitable for Sleeping Beauty, you could find yourself sharing the road with a hay wagon drawn by a pair of stout dray horses, as I did, or a putt-putting tractor pulling a load of downy ducks. The château at Pompadour, a gift from King Louis XV to his mistress, the Marquise de Pompadour, in 1745, today belongs to the National Stud Farm, founded by Louis and still breeding thoroughbreds and workhorses.

From the slate rooftops and bell towers of Uzerche, country roads follow the steep gorges of the Vézère. There are abrupt, surprising views near Objat and Voutezac. A stone bridge leads to Le Saillant, a pastoral scene worthy of an Old Master painting: people fishing from the bridge; yellow iris and giant red geraniums spilling out of stone flowerbeds; white ducks dunking near a rushing rock dam.

Collonges-la-Rouge is built entirely of irregular blocks of carmine sandstone. Everything - from the 11th-century church to the elegant Renaissance Castle de Vassinhac, from the covered market and bread ovens to the cafés and restaurants - everything in Collonges is bright red.

Aubusson owes its fame to the pure, soft water of the Creuse River, perfect for producing the delicate dyes of the fabled Aubusson tapestries and rugs. At the workshops of the Manufacture de St-Jean, the master dyer mixes all of his colors from three tattered plastic pots of red, yellow and blue powders, dousing them in boiling water with no measures or recipe, just a dead-on eye for color. After watching the artisans at large flat looms weaving those colors into tapestries, exactly as their 12th-century forebears did, or the women working by hand on a wall-sized upright carpet loom, you can be even more amazed by the delicate work of restoration being done for clients who have included Queen Elizabeth II and Versailles. Once again, nature and artistry in very happy result.



PORCELAIN PAINTING - LIMOGES



LOCAL GASTRONOMY IN LIMOUSIN

—

Text: Judy Fayard



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FISHING BOATS IN COLLIOURE

Crossing the bridge which spans the mighty Rhône in Avignon, one feels suddenly transported into another world, or rather another era. Here we are, right in the heart of Roman occupied Gaul. The year is 20 BC and Emperor Augustus reigns supreme. Continuing proof of this presence and testimony to the builders' skills displayed by the Roman Legions is the aqueduct they carved into the beauty of the surrounding countryside. This masterpiece of art and longevity is the Pont du Gard, a triple row of arches stretching, unbroken, some 50 metres above the valley of the Gardon.

Past the Pont du Gard, the dungeon-like Tour Magne beckons the traveller to the Imperial city of Nîmes. An ancient spring bearing the name of Nemausus flows through graceful gardens. It gave Roman soldiers much sought after water and, besides, a name to their city. As Nîmes prospered, it was soon graced with an amphitheatre now called "arènes" that could house up to 24,000 spectators crowding to enjoy gladiators' fights and more often than not, the desperate struggle of unarmed prisoners, or slaves, or both, trying to hold off bare handed, the likes of ravenous tigers and lions.

Interesting, from a geometric perspective, the "arènes" are oval in shape. Yet, the Maison carrée (literally "Square house") is decidedly rectangular. This former temple is over 2,000 years old and its state of preservation is such that it now houses a very modern arts center.

From the top of the heavy fortifications surrounding the city of Aigues-Mortes, one enjoys a grand view of the surrounding salt marshes and narrow canals hidden in a maze of reeds, home of selection of large flocks of pink flamingoes. We are on the threshold of the Camargue, with its vast open spaces, where land, water and sky combine to draw a line called infinity.

The old world charm of Aigues-Mortes is in striking contrast with the modern marina of Port-Camargue, the largest of its kind in Europe, La Grande Motte and its pyramid-shaped apartment buildings facing the Mediterranean or even the less mundane resort of Grau-du-Roi.

A short haul away is Montpellier, a bustling metropolis, with roots dating back a millennium and a carefully planned future for a thousand years to come.

Few examples of medieval or renaissance architecture remain (destructive wars of religion raged in the area and made room for new buildings to be erected during the classical era), yet old institutions such as the prestigious University have endured. Here, as early as the 12th century, Christian, Jewish and Arab doctors were pooling their knowledge to teach medicine to students flocking from all over Europe.

The streets invite tourists to explore and linger. Where the Friperie and Bras de Fer streets meet, near an elegant stairway with stone railing, an unobtrusive plaque reads: "The Marquis of Montcalm departed from this place on February 6, 1756 to fight for Canada and to meet a heroic death beneath the walls of Québec City on September 14, 1759".

Right in the heart of the city are to be found the Fabre Museum which boasts one of France's richest collection of 19th-century paintings and the Corum, a multipurpose building recently constructed to house the convention center and an opera house.

Further west, Sète rises out of the gentle waters of the Mediterranean. We grew to like this strange island with its old streets intersected by docks, jetties and canals, somewhat reminiscent of Venice.

Agde, founded some 2,500 years ago is another interesting coastal resort. Its museum contains valuable objects and tools dating back to the city's phocaean origins. Villas and summer bungalows dot the shores of the laguna sheltered from the sea by a rocky headland, the Cap.

An isolated area has been set aside for naturists. Nearly 30,000 adepts throng there every year to cultivate an even suntan in the most far away places.

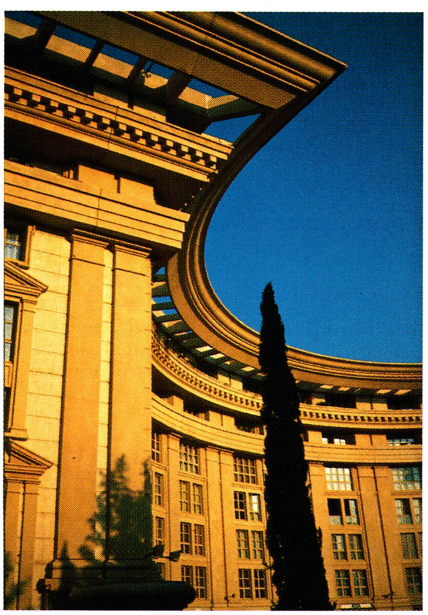
Pézenas is a small provincial city steeped in history. It has invested much time and effort in the restoration of old houses, private hotels, ancient shops, sometimes entire streets like that of the medieval ghetto. But paramount here is the memory of young Molière, from the days when he toured the neighbourhood and often came to town to delight local folks with his witty plays.

Narbonne is the capital of the Aude region. It sits at the crossroad between Spain and Toulouse and its ancient past is very much alive in some gorgeous monuments like the Saint-Just Cathedral and the Archbishop's Place.



PONT DU GARD

Just a short swing past the beautiful and extremely well restored Cistercian abbey of Fontfroide, we enter the province of Roussillon, the capital of which is Perpignan. It is an attractive city with ochre-colored façades, blazing red tile roofs, an abundance of near tropical vegetation, palm trees, fig trees, plane trees, not to mention the ever present red and yellow flags just to remind us where we are. Standing on top of a hill and overlooking it all, is an imposing citadel surrounding the King of Majorca's former palace.



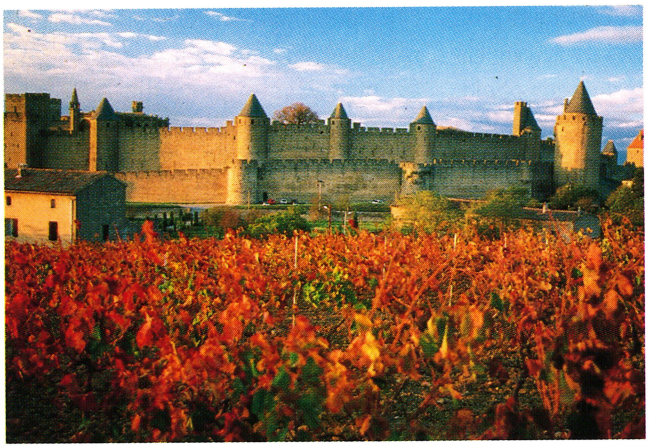
MONTPELLIER'S FINE ARCHITECTURE

The Mediterranean is always close at hand, gently lapping a string of golden beaches. They are varied enough to cater to everyone's fancy. Sometimes wide and long, hugging the shoreline in voluptuous curves, or narrow and secret, nestling deep inside rocky coves. One could perfectly well imagine being on the French Riviera, except for the crowds who are thinner and the prices, lower.

Local restaurant owners display menus strongly slanted towards fish and seafood in general. An absolute must is the classic Bouillabaisse served piping hot with the traditional "rouille" (a savory reddish mustard-colored sauce made with a garlic base) or its local version, the "Bourride", often made with angler fish. Snail and trout are also quite popular.

The Vermillion coast (Côte Vermeille in French) begins in Argelès with a spectacular outburst of jagged red rocks and headlands. The wondrously blue sky at Collioure, one of the area's most revered seaside villages, has been an inspiration to "fauvistes" painters such as Picasso, Matisse, Chagall and Dufy.

The picture postcard abbey of St-Michel-de-Cuxa nestles high up on the flank of the Canigou, an imposing pyramid of a mountain, towering high above the plain of Roussillon. It has beautifully survived its first millennium.



FORTRESS CITY OF CARCASSONNE

In Tautavel, in the Corbières mountain range, our prehistoric ancestors found respite from the frozen threat of the Ice Age. So here they stopped and settled some 450,000 years ago. The man of Tautavel, as he is called, left his skull in a cave that sheltered the tribe of hunters he belonged to.

Not far away, we discover some breathtaking citadels: Peyrepertuse, Lastours, Puivert, Puilaurens, Quéribus; they were the last refuge of the Cathares or Albigeois fleeing the merciless Inquisition.

The "Route des Corbières" winds through vineyard covered hillsides to reach another shrine of the crusade against the ill-fated Albigeois: Carcassone. The old city, the largest medieval fortress in the whole of Europe, is literally surrounded by mighty fortifications with battlements and loopholes and no less than 57 watch towers and barbicans.

We now head northwards, through the Parc Naturel du Languedoc and the Parc des Cévennes (both are nature parks with interesting fauna and flora), a region of garrigues or scrub land invaded by thyme and wild lavender. Soon, we enter Haut-Languedoc, a region hugging tightly around the Mont Aigoual and Mont Lozère. These make up the great divide as they feed streams and rivers that will either run south to the Mediterranean watershed or west to the Atlantic.

Here, nature has bestowed upon the land many features of striking beauty. First and foremost comes the Gorges du Tarn, a spectacular river canyon with sheer cliff walls rising up to 500 metres in places. Castles, belvederes and picturesque villages parade in rapid succession between Florac and Le Rozier.

Still further north, the Aubrac plateau unfolds its green expanse of rolling hills and thick forests. Not to be missed, the Gévaudan Nature Park, where visitors can still see European wolves and bisons.

The twin spires of St-Pierre Cathedral in Mende, capital of the old Gévaudan district, bid us a silent farewell. Limestone gradually makes way to granite. We're leaving Languedoc and entering Auvergne.

Text: Louis-Martin Tard



MENDE'S CATHEDRAL



THE GOURMET'S CORNER

Wines from Languedoc
Mediterranean Languedoc, extending from the Rhône to the Pyrénées, represents a vast "universe of wines" dating from the time of the Roman colonisation. It is, in fact, the largest wine-growing region in Europe.

Coteaux du Languedoc are grown mainly in Hérault. Costières du Gard wines are grown in the pebbly soil of the old Rhône delta. The red wines are fruity and light both in strength and taste, the dry rosés full of vitality. Excellent wines are produced in the coastal region, particularly Muscats du Languedoc. All these wines are an attractive pale gold in color, with velvety flavor and an unforgettable aroma. They are served chilled as aperitif or dessert wines.

Roussillon, Minervois and Corbières wines
Two categories of wines are produced in Roussillon. Both benefit from the same sunny conditions.
1. Natural wines without added alcohol, such as Côtes du Roussillon and Côtes du Roussillon-Villages, full-bodied red wines, rosés and fruity white wines, and Collioure, a well-constructed fragrant red wine.
2. Sweet wines: These are Banyuls, Maury, Rivesaltes and Muscat de Rivesaltes. They are served chilled and are excellent aperitif or dessert wines.
Blanquette de Limoux, produced in the high valley of Aude, is the oldest sparkling wine in the world. Fitou, a robust, still red wine, goes back to the times of King Philippe Auguste of France. Minervois are velvety, delicate red wines. Corbières and Minervois also produce excellent rosé wines.

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SAILORS ISLAND

A TINY CORNER OF FRANCE NEAR CANADA

It was off-season for visitors to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, that last French fragment of a once mighty North American empire. A last spring snowfall highlighted the terrain of this rugged archipelago in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

This was our morning to visit the permanent seal colony in the lagoon of the Grand Barachois. The temperature was -3 degrees Centigrade. The speed of the rubber Zodiac would also add a dreaded windchill factor. But those ruddy-cheeked Basque islanders were ready for this gaggle of escapees from urban miseries; they provided bright orange "floater suits". These coveralls, a route map of black velcro and zippers, were a one-size-fits-all type.

On my 5'4", 108-lb., frame I looked like a strange penguin who had tripped into a Moroccan dye vat. Frequent bobbing harbour seal heads gave promise of what awaited on the other side of a sand bar. Those of us who needed to keep boots dry for another day were piggy-backed from boat to shoreline. In the nursery, the seals viewed our lineup on a beached tree trunk with undisguised curiosity. We returned the compliment.



ALL IS PEACEFUL IN DOWNTOWN SAINT-PIERRE

When the new airline terminal and longer runaway are a reality (possible start, this year) jets will greatly increase last year's number of 16,000 tourists. As it is, reservations should be made for July and August, when 40-seat planes of Air St. Pierre bring flocks of eco-tourists, francophones, shoppers, wine and cuisine connoisseurs, and students of all ages for Franco Forum, a language institute in partnership with the University of Toronto.

Other visitors come by the 200-seat high speed passenger ferry from Fortune, Newfoundland. In the 55-minute trip they can have a sampling of duty-free shopping ahead or get their lungs accustomed to pollution-free sea air.

BEACHED FISHING BOATS IN SAINT-PIERRE'S HARBOUR



Saint-Pierre, although the smallest of the three islands, is the most densely populated with 5,683 residents, who talk about getting away from the town's "hustle and bustle". Most families own at least one car: their lives made comfortable by numerous subsidies from France.

My taxi driver was both bilingual and knowledgeable. Following Route de Savoyard, he pointed out the "Cutty Sark Villa". This 1928 house built of wood whiskey cases is still used by the original owner as "a summer retreat". These islands were linchpins in the rum-running business during Prohibition (Al Capone was a visitor of the times).

Island architecture is generally unpretentious. Only the cathedral entrance and tower are in stone, although its ceramic fish-shaped door handles are an unusual touch. Public buildings and homes are generally frame. Islanders favor durable boat paint in the same bright colors as the dories. But the comfortable interiors are a favorable surprise for those seeking B&B's rather than hotels.

These descendants of Brittany, Normandy and Basque peoples avoid outward ostentation, but where it is acceptable to show off, is in culinary arts. Two hot meals a day are traditional and even continental breakfasts have mouth-watering croissants and crusty baguettes. Delicacies abound: fresh scallops, salmon, mussels, cod tongues, snails (often basted or with sauces of the finest French wines). In our whole stay, there wasn't one disappointing course, let alone meal, and we hadn't had to travel all the way to France.

The gendarmes with their typical képi (cap) add to the old world atmosphere, but policing on the islands is not an arduous task. In an existence where people see each other every day, even a small theft can have long-lasting social consequences. Valuables are openly left in unlocked cars: a refreshing relief for apprehensive world travellers.

Out in the harbor is Île-aux-Marins (Sailor's Island) once home to 700 fishermen. After a serious fire in the 1930's, it was gradually abandoned. Now it has been completely restored, a true museum of human ecology. Conducted tours visit furnished houses, the common washing house, the church and cemetery (both still in use) and the Fort. A seven-minute boat ride out gives a good water view of Saint-Pierre.

Joseph Le Huenen was born there. A mayor of Saint-Pierre for over 16 years, he is now curator of the museum. At 85 years, he regularly climbs its three flights of stairs. It is a fascinating collection with emphasis on marine artifacts and history. It took 200 years for the 10 km isthmus, called La Dune, to form and connect them. Mr. Le Huenen, in front of a map showing the exact location of 700 shipwrecks since the 19th century, updates it for me to 774!

The strongest call to this archipelago comes from Mother Nature. Naturalist Roger Etcheberry joined us (as he does with summer visitors) as we sailed up the east coast of Langlade Island pointing out the geological diversity of the region: 60 metre high cliffs and Cape Percé, a smaller version of Gaspesie's Percé Rock. We tramped over crowberry to view 2,000 kittiwakes, black guillemots, cormorants and gulls. They feed on tiny capelin, which in June also attracts four different species of whales.



TYPICAL CHURCH



THIS IS A HORSE'S PARADISE

White-tailed deer abound. Red foxes and half-wild ponies give life to the tundra-like landscape around the port of Miquelon, whose population is 700. To visit here is to step into a French movie set of a small town. The old church has a large cracked crucifix said to be carved by a sailor during a voyage in 1815. In Mme Therese Revert's homey "Entre-Nous Restaurant" dining is a delight. Tales of buried gold from the wreck of the 3-masted Fulwood in 1828 are passed around the table; but the real treasure is Mme Revert's Charlotte au Chocolat.

Text: Laddie Dennis



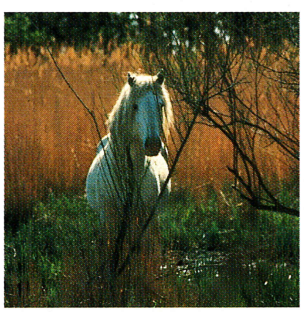
THE MAGIC OF PAINTERS, POETS AND WRITERS CAN SOMETIMES GIVE PLACES A NEAR MYSTICAL QUALITY. MENTION PROVENCE AND RIGHT AWAY OUR IMAGINATION BRINGS FORTH SCENTS OF THYME AND LAVENDER, THE STRIDENT SONG OF CICADAS IN THE MIDDAY HEAT, THE FLAVOR OF PASTIS BEING SIPPED SLOWLY UNDER THE SHADE OF PLANE TREES. PROBABLY NO OTHER REGION OF FRANCE HAS BEEN THE SOURCE OF SO MUCH INSPIRATION.

IN SEARCH OF THE VERY SOUL OF PROVENCE

It was late in the afternoon, the sky a postcard blue, and the heat fairly bouncing off the rust-red earth as I headed through the Alpilles to Arles.

Like James Pope-Hennessy, I always find "one's chief memories of a journey through Provence are color memories". Certainly, the palette and texture of this part of Bouches-du-Rhône are particularly hypnotic: the gray-white outcrops of limestone scattered like bleached bones around the Val d'Enfer, the dusty-green olive trees with their gnarled trunks, the straggly tufts of herbs and grasses sprouting from soil so vivid that painters used to scoop it up, mix it with oil and use it raw on their canvases.





POPE'S PALACE - AVIGNON

WILD HORSE IN THE CAMARGUE

It is, of course, Van Gogh and Gauguin territory - from Saint-Rémy southwards to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. Arles, where they lived together for a time in "The Yellow House", a city I could easily put down roots in, too. In February and March when the mistral blows bitterly down the Rhône corridor, chopping the river into white horses, I might not, perhaps, find it so appealing, but in June, the infamous north wind was merely taking the sting out of the temperature.

Wondering vaguely if I'd find a hotel without too much of a trek, I drove through the outskirts of town, followed the "centre-ville" signs and, quite by accident, found myself at the entrance to the courtyard of Hôtel d'Arlatan. This turned out to be a find. Quietly elegant, with bits of Roman ruin disconcertingly visible below the glass floor of the foyer, it was just round the corner from the Place du Forum, a little square where I could happily sit at a table under the plane trees, drinking, eating and watching the world do likewise for endless dappled afternoons.

You only have to wander up the Boulevard des Lices on a Saturday morning to know Arles is quintessentially a southern city. On the market stalls that line the route is piled the abundance of the Mediterranean - heaps of shining olives and fresh peaches, fish and shellfish on ice, sacks of herbs and jars of lavender honey. There are exquisite baskets and bouquets of flowers and, everywhere you look, bright provençal cottons - either stacked in bales or made up into frilly gypsy skirts which hang like garlands outside the shops.

Late that night, there was the bonus of seeing proud gypsy girls wearing these as they trotted past on horseback, accompanied by saturnine men in flat black hats reining in their frisky mounts. I had apparently just missed one of the summer's main spectacles held in the Arena (an object lesson: to always check for events with the local Syndicat d'Initiative when you arrive). Climbing quickly to the top rung of the ancient amphitheatre, I caught the last moments of the show's finale. While a fantasia of fireworks crackled and fizzed above us, forming a canopy of shooting stars, I sang the Marseillaise as full-bloodedly as the Arlésiens.





AIX-EN-PROVENCE - FOUNTAIN MAGIC

LA CIOTAT - SEASCAPE

Arles also has an antique theatre and, in odd places, portions of sagging Corinthian columns poke out between the tiles and bricks of houses. You can see exactly what Hilaire Belloc meant in Hills and the Sea: "... as you walk along the tortuous lanes between the high houses, passing as you go the ornaments of every age, you turn some dirty little corner or other and come upon the titanic arches of Rome".

Horses and horsemanship are natural preoccupations in a city on the fringe of the Camargue. This extensive swathe of marshland is one of the country's major nature parks and France's Wild West. In a car, you can be disappointed for there's not a lot to see - its graceful pink flamingoes tend to give tarmac a wide berth even if the mosquitoes don't - but it's an altogether different experience, I'm told, if you switch to the other kind of horsepower and go trekking through the wilderness of reeds and water astride one of the white Camargue ponies.





PHOTO: J.L. SEILLE - CONSEIL GÉNÉRAL 84

THE VILLAGE OF BONNIEUX

PROVENÇAL POTTERY

Here and there, you spot clusters of horses tethered at the ranches which organize riding holidays. Or, if your seat is better suited to the discomfort of a 4-wheel drive, you can go "on safari".

"Dude" cowboys - all hat, boots and glitter denim - are much in evidence in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer on the coast, as are lots of genuine gypsies ready to con you, albeit with immense charm, out of your francs. The Romany "capital" of France, scene of gypsy festivals and bullfights, has a distinctly Spanish flavor, is very picturesque and great fun. I loved it in early June - even if the sea was like ice, but this is probably the best time to go if you want to avoid the crowds which clog its narrow alleyways later on.

The same could be said of Les Baux, but somehow I feel ill at ease in this strange village so dramatically perched in the Alpilles. Perhaps the debauchery of the seigneurs who inhabited its stark 12th-century ruined castle has left a bad odour. Whatever, little remains of a regime that sank into a decline and fall, like the Roman Empire, except the shell of its existence, but the village is pretty. Somewhere to pause - if not for long.

There are so many other worthwhile places to see in south-western provence: cities like Marseilles, a port of character if ever there was one; and heavenly Aix-en-Provence leading you to the country of Cézanne with its dark paintbrush cypresses and the enigmatic Mont Sainte-Victoire which so obsessed him.

To my mind, however, for sheer charisma the walled city of Avignon wins hands down. Wandering into it one evening at that pleasant hour when the sun begins to lose its heat but not its light, I could hear the strains of Paraguayan music. The streets were alive, the shops chic, the pavement cafés filling with people meeting people. Suddenly, unprepared for it, I came into the wide space outside the Palace of the Popes and was knocked sideways by the splendour of its pale, soaring towers. The primitive pipes of the strolling players from Paraguay, who had drawn a small audience, somehow seemed in key with the medieval atmosphere.

Alas, the remains of the Pont d'Avignon outside the city walls are a bit of an anti-climax, but the rest of the old town is not.

All of this encompasses what most people think of as Provence. But there is much more. It is a huge region stretching way up into the north-east behind the Côte d'Azur. Provence is also the Alps and winter ski places like Briançon, Montgenèvre and Pra-Loup, which in summer become magical mountain escapes.

A couple of years ago, I took a route to the south in my convertible - hair blowing in the wind as it used to do in wistful teenage dreams! - down through Gap and Sisteron. At the time, I was in a hurry to get to friends in the Vaucluse by sundown, but how I wished I'd had the foresight to allow a day or two to linger amid this stunning scenery. From the iced peaks of the Hautes-Alpes, where the chutes of distant paragliders could be seen floating down like giant butterflies, through yawning valleys with meadows and impressionistic blurs of wildflowers, to the rugged hills and warmer air of the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, it was a journey that made my smile grow broader with every mile.

To action men and women, this is mountain-biking, hiking, riding country. It is glorious nature, a botanist's paradise. It is really anything you want it to be, for there are some wonderful

old towns, too, like Sisteron, clinging to a hillside overlooking the Durance, with its medieval houses stacked in tiers above the oaks, poplars and elms that line the river. There are superb views from the terrace of the citadel, which Vauban, the great military architect, had a lot to do with fortifying.

Vauban was, in fact, quite busy in this area, as a special Route de Vauban dans les Alpes proves, one of 12 itineraries provided by the local tourist office. Others include the Lavender Route, the Olive Route, Routes Paul Cézanne and Van Gogh, and curiosities like the Sun-dial Route and even, would you believe, the Mexican Villas Route?





A CUISINE RIPE WITH FLAVOR AND COLOR

THE ROUSSET PASS IN UPPER PROVENCE

My route, on this occasion, then veered westward, and from Sisteron to Forcalquier, through what seemed to me a totally unspoiled, rustic idyll - one of the loveliest in rural Provence. But I'll say no more than this. For it's where I intend to look for a house, settle down and write a book about my first year's experiences of provençal life. Or has that been done before?

Text: Anne Gregg

THE GOURMET'S CORNER

The cuisine of Provence
Local dishes are spicy, aromatic and colorful and reflect the joy of living in this Mediterranean region. Olive oil, tomatoes, onions, garlic and herbs (thyme, rosemary, wild thyme, sage, basil, etc.) are the main ingredients in almost all the specialties. "Pastis" is accompanied by black or green olives à la "pichouline" or canapés of tapenade (a paste of black olives, capers and anchovies). Aïgo-boulido (garlic and cabbage soup), Aïgo-saou (fish, cabbage and tomato soup) and soupe au pistou (vegetable soup flavored with basil) are all-time favorites.

Meat is usually cooked in a sauce, like boeuf en daube (beef stew), pieds et paquets marseillais (sheep's feet and stuffed tripe, garlic and parsley), chicken sautéed with tomatoes. Vegetables and pasta dishes include tomates à la provençale, fried aubergines, shrimps in sauce, stuffed courgettes, ravioli, canneloni, capelleti, etc...

Pissaladière (an onion flan garnished with olives and anchovies), panbagna, anchoïade and ratatouille are popular throughout Provence.

But Provençale cooking is particularly original in the preparation of fish: bouillabaisse, bourride (two distinctive kinds of fish soup), aïoli (salt cod with garlic mayonnaise), red mullet with rosemary, perch with fennel, bream à la provençale must be sampled.

Mussels are eaten raw or grilled and scrambled eggs with sea urchin are a particular delicacy.

Cheese
The regional cheeses are mainly goat and ewe cheeses: Brousse, Banon pebre d'aï (with herbs).

Wines of Provence
The Côtes de Provence wine region, mainly known for its dry, fruity, rosé wines, also produces excellent red and white wines. Four other wine regions in Provence produce their own typical wines. Palette are elegant, fruity red, rosé and white wines. Cassis is mainly known for a very dry white wine. Bandol, robust, velvety, well-bred red wines, dry and fruity, rosé and white wines.

However, foremost on the list are the heady reds from the Southern Côte du Rhône: Châteauneuf du Pape and Gigondas. Tavel enjoys pride of place among rosés.

Your contacts in Provence
Comité départemental du tourisme des Bouches-du-Rhône
6, rue du jeune Anacharsis 13001 Marseille
Tel.: 91.54.92.66
Fax: 91.33.01.82

Service loisirs accueil
Domaine du Vergnon
13370 Mallemort
Tel.: 90.59.18.05
Fax: 90.59.16.75

Comité départemental du tourisme du Vaucluse
Place Campana
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In an uncharacteristic burst of civic and national zeal, authorities in the French capital have been sprinkling the outlying regions of Paris with giant, new buildings - buildings that, in many cases, are designed to pull together certain functions that had been inefficiently clustered in the congested heart of the City of Light.

If cranes, dump trucks and bulldozers are your "cup of filtre", you are in luck if you visit Paris this summer.

And, you are equally in luck if your preference is for the famous classical-style buildings of central Paris, because they are being retained and put to different uses.

Well, most of them are. The old Vincennes Railway Station, at the Place de la Bastille toward the east, was demolished in 1984. In its place, a contemporary-style opera house (designed by Canadian architect Carlos Ott) opened five years ago.

The main auditorium of the new Opera-Bastille has 2,700 comfortable seats, and there's a second expandable space, seating as few as 600 or as many as 1,000.

The cramped, flamboyant old Opera still stands in the heart of Paris, as it has since 1875, now housing ballet productions almost exclusively.

(continued on page 42)

THE LOUVRE'S BRAND NEW PYRAMID



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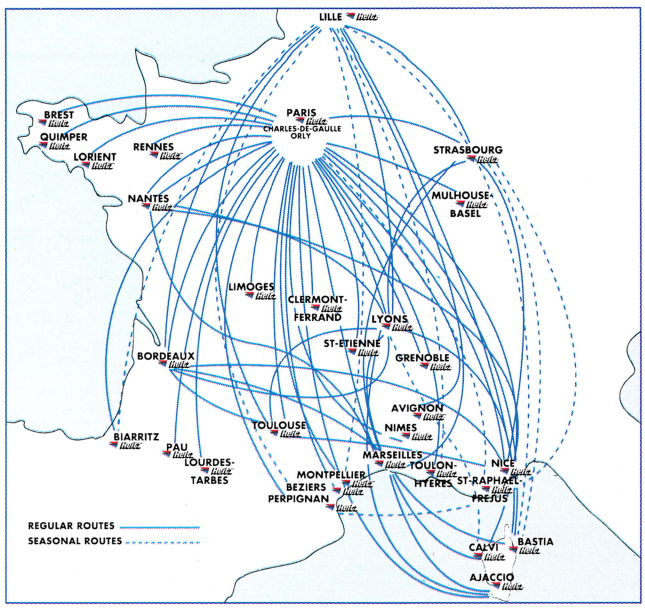


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- *Offer valid for Canadian residents and sold only in Canada.*
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- *Passes are purchased with the issuance of an MCO redeemable at selected AIR INTER's sales points.*
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We have a very innovative fare policy. All travellers are welcome to take advantage of numerous and substantial discount programs such as:

- Le France Pass which offers unlimited travel for any 7 days within a one month period ($ 349)
- Le France Air-Car Pass... 2 days unlimited air with 7 day car rental within a one month period ($ 399)
- The Youth and Student France Pass... 5 days unlimited travel within a one month period ($ 229). Please see "1994 Big Value Packages" section for special conditions.
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- Groups (10 or more)
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- Youth and Students/Senior Citizens.

We, at Air Inter, are determined to answer all the specific needs of our clientele: safety, well-adapted schedules and affordable fares.

For more information, please call our General Agent, Air France, at 1-800-667-2747.

OUR 1994 BIG VALUE PACKAGES

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From $231 for 7 days.

Rent your car here in Canada prior to departure at prices that will leave the competition far behind. Rental durations from 3 to 84 days. Free pick up and return at airports and throughout France. Prices available with or without insurance.

Here are some examples:

Peugeot 106 (or similar) standard transmission, taxes and unlimited mileage included.

7 days:	$231
14 days:	$462
21 days:	$693

Peugeot 309 (Cat. F), automatic transmission, taxes and unlimited mileage included.

7 days:	$420
14 days:	$840
21 days:	$1,260

Renault Espace, a minivan (Cat. I), 7 seats, standard transmission, taxes and unlimited mileage included.

7 days:	$686
14 days:	$1,372
21 days:	$2,058

CAR LEASING WITH RENAULT

from as little as $679 for 22 days.

Leasing is the temporary purchase of a brand new car. You pay only for the duration used. This duration is set in advance and many vary from 22 days to 6 months. Leasing includes the manufacturer's warranty, unlimited mileage, comprehensive international insurance with no deductible. Many models are available with either standard or automatic transmissions, family cars or minibuses.

Examples:

Renault TWINGO 3 doors, unlimited mileage and insurances included.
22 days $679.

Contact your Travel Agent or ask for the Jet Tours brochure by calling (514) 285-0088.

CHOOSE CITROËN AND PEUGEOT WITH EUROP AUTO

from $689 for 22 days.

Europ Auto offers you the largest selection of 94 models. All cars are brand new, with manufacturer's warranty, unlimited mileage and comprehensive international insurance with no deductible. Whatever your transportation needs, there's a Citroën or a Peugeot to meet them.

Contact your Travel Agent and ask for the Europ Auto brochure.

BY RAIL WITH RAIL EUROPE INC.

Rail Europe Inc. offers you a wide range of packages to discover Europe at leisure in 1994.
Rail Europe Inc. makes it easy for you! Choose how many days you wish to travel, plan your own itinerary and decide how you will travel. For France, our rail, car and air passes are yours for the picking.

FRANCE RAILPASS

The whole of France from $165.

Unlimited rail travel in France on any train including the TGV in 1st or 2nd class. Any 3 days within a 1 month period. Option to purchase up to 6 days of extra rail travel.
Free: Rail transfer from Orly or Roissy Charles-de-Gaulle Airports/Paris and return.

Reduced rates on Seine River cruises with Bateau Parisien.

FRANCE RAIL'N DRIVE PASS

From $195.

Travel anytime, any 6 days within a 1 month period - continuing 3 days rail travel with 3 days Avis car rental, from $195. Use the train for long distance inter city travel while exploring by car the area of your choice. Option to purchase up to 6 days of train travel and/or Avis car rental. 520 Avis rental locations are available throughout France.

FRANCE RAIL'N FLY

A super deal from $279.

This Rail Europe package combines your France Railpass with the services of Air Inter, the French domestic airline that services 31 cities daily.

The France Rail'n Fly pass gives you any 4 days of travel to be used over a 1 month period, including:

- Any 3 days of unlimited 1st or 2nd class rail travel in France
- Any 1 day of unlimited coach class air travel with Air Inter flights, series 5,000 Class "M"
- Option to add up to 6 extra days of rail travel and 1 additional day of air travel



T.G.V.

FRANCE FLY RAIL'N DRIVE

The great combination from $305.

Here is a combination of all three France travel programs in one convenient package: RAIL + AIR + CAR.

The France Fly Rail'n Drive pass gives you 7 travel days to be used over a 1 month period including:

- Any 3 days of unlimited 1st or 2nd class rail travel in France
- Any 3 days of unlimited kilometres Avis car rental in France: local tax, and free drop-off in France all included
- Any 1 day of unlimited coach class air travel with Air Inter flights, series 5000 Class "M". Option to add up to 6 extra days of rail travel, 9 additional days of Avis car rental, and 1 additional day of air travel with Air Inter.

FLEXOTEL "BEST WESTERN"

From $66.

Best Western Hotels offer you through Rail Europe a voucher program designed for maximum flexibility. Valid for all participating hotels in France, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary and Great Britain.

In each participating country, there are 7 categories of hotels. In all categories, the price quoted is a price per room and includes private bath/shower, service charges and continental breakfast.

Purchase your vouchers from your travel agent or Rail Europe before leaving North America, reserve the first night through Rail Europe. For subsequent nights you may reserve through Rail Europe, or in Europe, from hotel to hotel, or by calling Best Western reservation centers.

Contact your Travel Agent or Rail Europe.

Our 1994 Big Value Packages

BY PLANE WITH AIR INTER

Le France Pass
only $349.

All of France by air. 7 days (not necessarily consecutive) within a one month period. Allows unlimited travel on the entire Air Inter domestic network (31 cities).

The Air-Car France Pass
only $399.

All of France by air and by car. 2 days air (same conditions as the France Pass), plus 1 car rental from Hertz (A class) for 7 days, unlimited mileage, VAT included (CDW and PAI excluded).

The Youth and Student France Pass
only $229.

Unlimited air travel for any 5 days within a one month period. Any youth under 25 years of age or any student under 27 years of age is eligible.

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Cruising through the heart of Paris
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Discover Paris from a new angle. Two departures a day from April to November. You board our launch in front of the Orsay Museum, sailing past the Louvre and Notre-Dame before entering the St-Martin Canal leading to the City des Sciences, the Géode and Parc de la Villette. A three-hour cruise to span over 500 years of fascinating history.

Your floating home
From $780 per boat (2 passengers) per week, low season.

This is the most leisurely way to discover the other face of France. No noise, no rush. Just plenty of time to relax and enjoy.

Contact your Travel Agent or call (514) 369-6155.

CHOICE ACCOMMODATION THROUGHOUT FRANCE

JET TOURS SELECTION

Cozy hotels that are renowned throughout France. Discover France and save money with Jet Tours' selection of four types of accommodation.

Logis de France
Starting at $43 per person, breakfast included.

A choice of 300 hotels specializing in personalized accommodation and authentic regional cuisine. Prices are per person, per night, double occupancy, breakfast included (minimum 2 nights).
Comfort class: $43
Comfort plus class: $59

Ibis-Arcade hotel chain
Starting at $43 per person, breakfast included.

Comfort, flexibility and affordability are the order of the day at the Ibis-Arcade hotel chain, as part of the "Drive-In" program promoted by Jet Tours. Canadian travellers pay only $43 per person, breakfast included, for open vouchers which are accepted at more than 400 2 star establishments across France and Europe.

Altea-Mercure and Novotel hotels
Starting at $59 per person, breakfast included.

Three hotel chains have joined forces to better accommodate travellers on the move. Together, they offer over 200 establishments across Europe including more than 100 in France. It's called our "Surprising Europe" package.

Voucher prices are per person, per night, double occupancy, breakfast included (minimum purchase of 2 nights): $59.

A surcharge may be imposed locally by some hotels, in particular those in Paris and Nice, and at certain periods of the year.

Pullman-Sofitel hotels
Starting at $78 per person.

Two major European hotel chains have come together to offer their renowned establishments at identical prices: the "SILVER" rate at $78 per night, per person (based on double occupancy) and the "GOLD" rate at $98 per night, per person (based on double occupancy), minimum 2 nights. Breakfast included.
The two chains have 39 hotels to choose from including 18 in France.

Unused vouchers are refundable (less $5 per voucher). Minimum purchase of 2 vouchers.

Contact your Travel Agent or call (514) 285-0088 and ask for the Jet Tours brochure.

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*prices include applicable taxes and transportation charges

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(french)

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Our 1994 Big Value Packages

Jet Tour "Knock-out" Travel Packages

This summer, Jet Tours proposes its "knock-out" travel packages: a simple, low-cost formula for visiting France and its picturesque regions. Here is a sampling of what's offered:

Knock-out package to Paris

at $918 per person in April, May or October.

Includes:
- Return air fare on Air France from Toronto or Montréal to Paris, taxes included
- Meals and drinks aboard the plane
- Transfers between Charles-de-Gaulle airport and the Air France Porte-Maillot terminus
- Accommodation for 6 nights in a 2 star hotel with continental breakfast every morning

Knock-out France

at $858, from April 1st to June 14th and in October.

Includes:
- Return air fare on Air France from Toronto or Montréal to Paris, taxes included
- Transfers between Charles-de-Gaulle airport and the Air France Porte-Maillot terminus
- Open accommodation for 6 nights at any of the Logis de France establishments (300 in France, touring class), breakfast included

Knock-out "Fly & Drive"

Travel with another person for 7 days in April and October and pay only $698 per person.

Includes:
- Return air fare on Air France from Toronto or Montréal to Paris, taxes included
- Category "A" car rental (Renault Clio or Ford Fiesta) for 7 days, including unlimited mileage, local taxes, third-party liability (civil liability) insurance and no-deductible car theft protection

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Travel between April 1 and June 14 or in October and pay only $928

Includes:
- Return air fare on Air France from Toronto or Montréal to Paris, taxes included
- Transfers between the Charles-de-Gaulle airport and the Air France Porte-Maillot terminus
- Open accommodation for 6 nights in an Altea Mercure** hotel with breakfast included (over 200 establishments throughout Europe including more than 100 in France)

(N.B. At certain periods, hotels in major cities may charge supplements which are payable locally).

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Travel between April and mid-July and pay only $334.

Includes:
- Return air fare from Paris or Nice to Ajaccio, Calvi or Bastia
- Accommodation for 3 nights at Hotel Santa Maria*** in Corisca with breakfast included

Knock-out French Riviera

From $398 per person, from April to October (except during major festivals).

Includes:
- Return air fare from Paris to Nice
- Transfer from Nice airport to Hotel Gounod***
- Accommodation for three nights, breakfast included



FRIENDLY LITTLE INN

Cruise on the Rhône or the Seine rivers

Jet Tours invites you to meander across France in blissful comfort aboard a cruise ship!

- Savour a 4 day/3 night culinary cruise aboard the M.S. CEZANNE and ply the Rhône from Lyon to Viviers. Along the way, discover Vienne, Tournon and the Beaujolais vineyards. The price per person, based on double occupancy and full board, is $1,068
- Enjoy a 5 day/4 night cruise on the Seine between Paris and Honfleur aboard the M.S. NORMANDIE. The price per person in June is $1,184, based on double occupancy and full board

Contact your Travel Agent or call (514) 285-0088 and ask for the Jet Tours brochure.

Best Western

A prestigious choice of 3 and 4 star hotels starting from $61 per person, breakfast included.

Best Western has a long and proud tradition of quality and offers a wide selection of either "Comfort" or "Superior Comfort" category hotels at fixed rates, available in the "go as you please" or pre-reserved formula.

Ask your Travel Agent for Tours Chantecler's 1994 Europe Mosaic brochure.

France Accueil

A selection of 124 comfortable hotels throughout France. Starting from $45 per person, breakfast included.

France Accueil Hotels are small family-run operations available in every region of France, in small villages as well as big cities. You will surely enjoy the regional food served at the hotels' restaurants and the friendly staff of the France Accueil properties.

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Our 1994 Big Value Packages

Climat de France

156 overnight stops starting from $41 per person, buffet breakfast included.

Always located near big cities with easy access and free parking, Climat de France hotels are ideal stopover points for those travelling throughout France. Just purchase your accommodation vouchers prior to departure and choose your hotels as you drive along. All Climat de France hotels have an adjacent "La Soupière" restaurant that serves regional food at affordable prices.

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Relais du Silence

A choice of friendly country inns, manor houses and castles throughout France from $90 double occupancy.

Discover France at leisure from Relais to Relais. A selection of charming friendly and comfortable hotels, with cuisine to match.

Relais du Silence hotel guide available at Relais du Silence,
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Hotels et Residences Du Roy

From $110 per room, per night, double occupancy.

Choose from a selection of 3 and 4 star hotel residences in Paris and Nice. Hard to beat prices and a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Ask your Travel Agent for the Air Transat Holidays brochure.

Novotel - Mercure - Ibis hotels

From $45 per night, per person, double occupancy. Breakfast included.

Approximately 600 establishments in the 2 and 3 star category. They are comfortable and typical... the perfect vacation solution. The rest is up to you. Just go and enjoy!

Ask your Travel Agent for the Air Transat Holidays brochure.

Ibis hotels

Only $130 per person for 3 nights, double occupancy. Breakfast included.

Voucher will be issued on a per person, per night, double occupancy basis. Continental breakfast included. With or without a reservation.
3 night package: $130 per night, per person, double occupancy. Additional night: $45 per night, per person, double occupancy.

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Résidences Citadines

Your studio in France for as low as $64 per night, per studio... in the heart of the city!

Citadines is a chain of residences located in the very heart of the major French cities offering 3 star category comfort. Enjoy a totally furnished studio or apartment for a night... or for a month! An economical solution for families. Special rates are available for long stays.

Ask your Travel Agent for Tours Chanteclerc's 1994 Europe Mosaic brochure.

JET SETTING ON THE FRENCH RIVIERA

JET TOURS RECOMMENDATIONS

The accent's on savings! Come to the Côte d'Azur to rest. You'll get the original away-from-it-all feeling. And you'll experience the warmth and comfort that make for a memorable trip you'll want to tell your grandchildren about.

Our Côte d'Azur apartments are made to measure. Have a place of your own! Come and live in France just as you live at home. Pick an apartment in some of the most beautiful and most sought after holiday locations in France. You can have an apartment of any size, from a bachelor on up. All apartments are tastefully furnished and offer standard modern comfort.

Pierre & Vacances

from $413 per week, per studio, in April, May and October.

Your "home" in the Côte d'Azur, Corsica and Brittany comes equipped with dishes, bed linen, towels as well as telephone and colour TV. You'll find shops and local services nearby.

You can choose from 10 elegant "Pierre et Vacances" residences at Grimaud, Cannes, St. Raphaël, Villefranche, Marina Baie des Anges, Cap d'Ail (near Monaco) Brittany, Vendée and Corsica. Apartments also available. (Tourist tax payable locally).

Contact your Travel Agent or ask for the Jet Tours brochure by calling (514) 285-0088.

A choice of 27 hotels from Cannes to Monaco

Cannes	From
Des Étrangers	$59
Cristal****	$95
Noga Hilton****	$168

Monaco	
Abela***	$115
Loews****L	$192

Nice	
Monsigny**	$51
Arcade**	$55
Alexandra***	$59
Gounod***	$69
Mercure Masséna****	$76
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NICE

OUR 1994 BIG VALUE PACKAGES

La Pérouse****	$98
Sofitel Splendid****	$105
Beaurivage****	$107
Méridien****	$125
Abela Nice****	$104

Prices are per person, per night, based on double occupancy, in April and October. They include breakfast.

Contact your Travel Agent or ask for the Jet Tours brochure by calling (514) 285-0088.

NICE
PLAISANCE HOTEL

From $38 per person, per night, breakfast included.

34 comfortable rooms in this 2 star hotel situated in the center of Nice, close to all touristic attractions.*

BEST WESTERN ACROPOLE

From $73 per person, per night, breakfast included.

Located 200 metres from the New Convention Center, the Acropole has 120 modern and comfortable rooms, all with mini-bar. 3 star category*

CANNES
BEST WESTERN BEAUSÉJOUR

From $61 per person, per night, breakfast included.

300 metres from the beach with all the comforts of a 3 star hotel. Rooms with balconies. Private garden, pool, solarium and restaurant.*

MENTON
BEST WESTERN PRINCE DE GALLES

From $61 per person, breakfast included.

Newly renovated hotel facing the sea with well-equipped soundproof rooms. Bar with panoramic terrace overlooking the bay. Public pool and tennis courts in close proximity. Private parking.*

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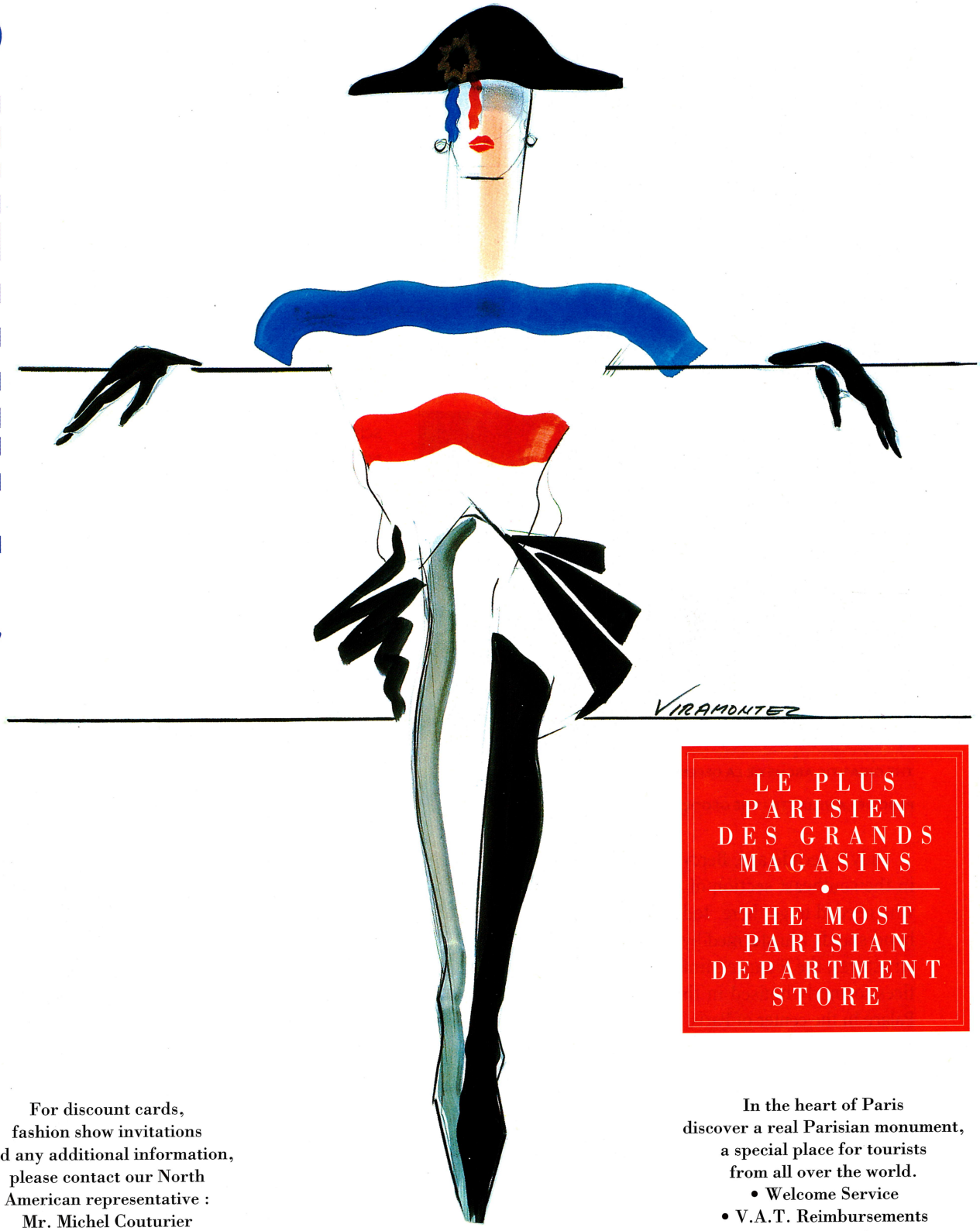
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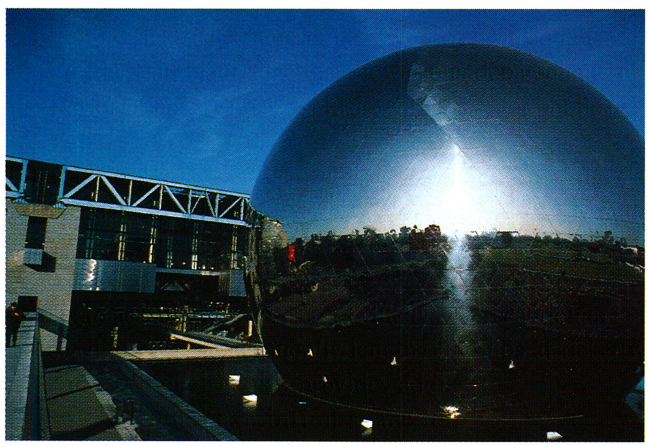
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THE GIGANTIC ARCHE DE LA DÉFENSE

PARC DE LA VILLETTE - THE GÉODE

Only a decade ago, Bercy was a dreary industrial district in the southeast section of Paris, frequented only by those who needed to go there. Today, that working-class neighborhood stands transformed by two major, but contrasting new structures: the Finance Ministry consolidates most of the offices formerly housed in the Richelieu wing of the Louvre Palace in the center of Paris, while the Palais Omnisports is a pyramid-shaped, 17,000-seat stadium nearby, in Bercy. Memphis, Tennessee, has a similarly-shaped 22,500-seat stadium, but here in Bercy some of the pyramid's slopes are ingeniously covered with grass. (Just as I was wondering who cuts the grass, a large, motorized lawn mower was lowered by rope from a point near the apex.)

Some 22 sports, from soccer to windsurfing, can be accommodated at the Palais Omnisports, as well as rock concerts, trade shows and the like.

Another addition to the Bercy skyline will be the new African Center of Paris. It's the work of U.S. architect, Frank Gehry, best known for his design of Festival Disney at the gates of Euro Disneyland, in an eastern suburb of Paris.

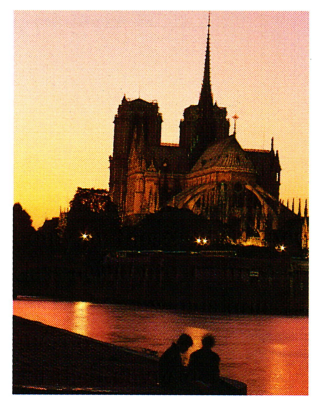
Still in the early stages of construction is the future Library of France, a high-tech, high-rise structure that will house and rationalize the various collections of the former National Library, near the Louvre. The old building will remain a library, but dedicated only to the history of art.

Among all of the recent large-scale additions to the list of public spaces in Paris, the most popular seems to be La Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie - a sprawling, multi-storey science center that attracts nearly six million visitors annually to a northern fringe of the city that was previously unknown to most Parisians.

At the opposite end of the Parc de la Villette, in which the science center stands, Cité de la Musique is taking shape. It will bring together the various departments of the National Conservatory of Music, with space for public performances.

Back in the center of Paris, in front of the classical façade of the Louvre, stands the starkly modern pyramid designed a decade ago by U.S. architect I.M. Pei.

Its interior serves chiefly as a reception area to accommodate the frequently lengthy line-ups at ticket windows - although it also provides additional exhibition space for sculptures and paintings, and affords a glimpse of the centuries-old foundations of the Louvre, originally a royal palace. The recent addition of the new Richelieu wing has now made it the world's largest museum.



Standing near the pyramid in the Napoleon Court of the Louvre, you can take in the most historic perspective in all of Paris: a straight line through the Arch of the Carrousel, the Tuileries Gardens, the Place de la Concorde, up the Champs-Elysées, through the Arc de Triomphe, and on to the horizon, where the soaring new Grande Arche de la Fraternité - standing in perfect symmetry - symbolizes a gateway to the East.



NOTRE-DAME DE PARIS

PEOPLE-GAZING IN ST-GERMAIN DES PRÉS

Text: Vince Egan



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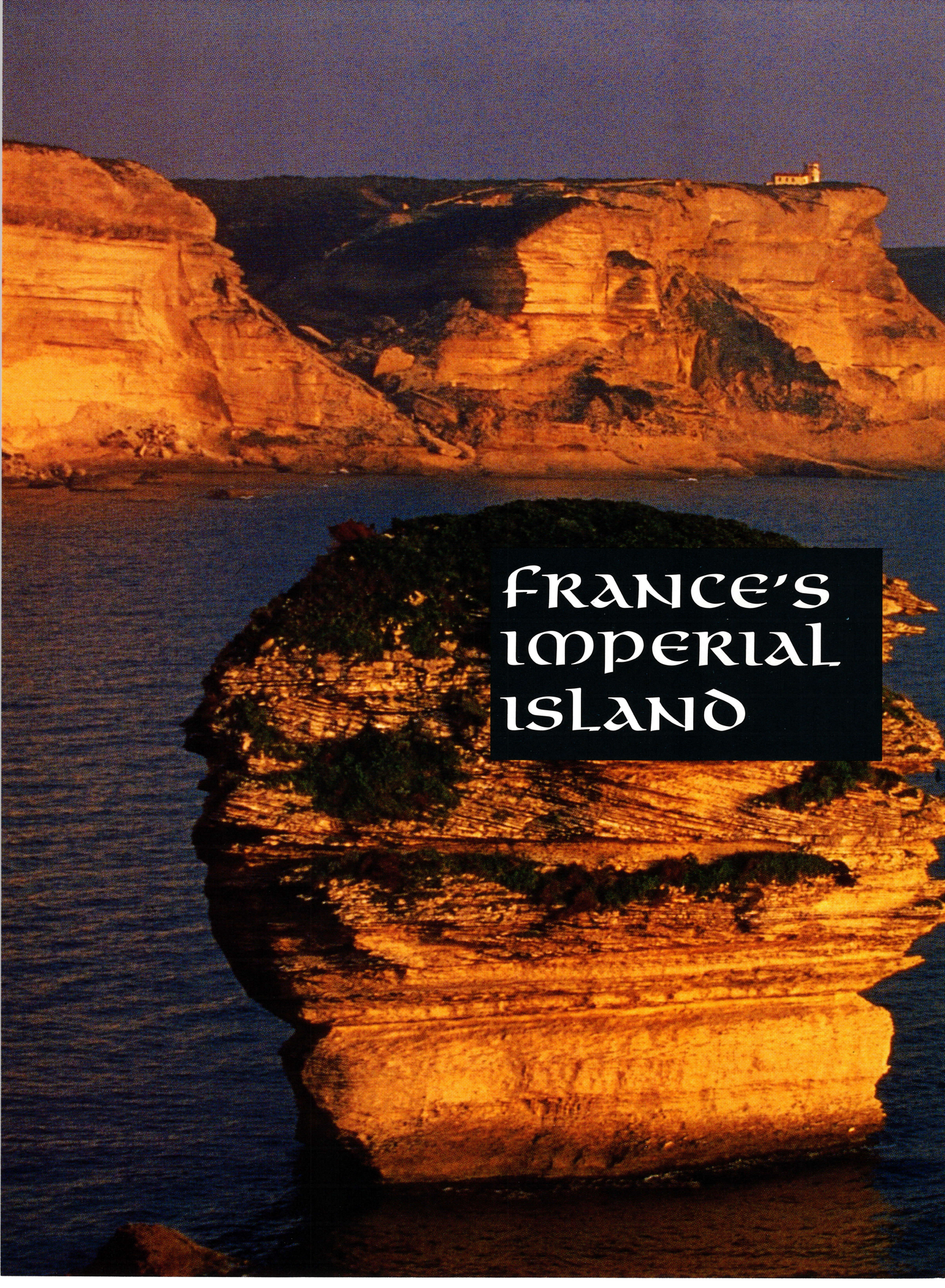
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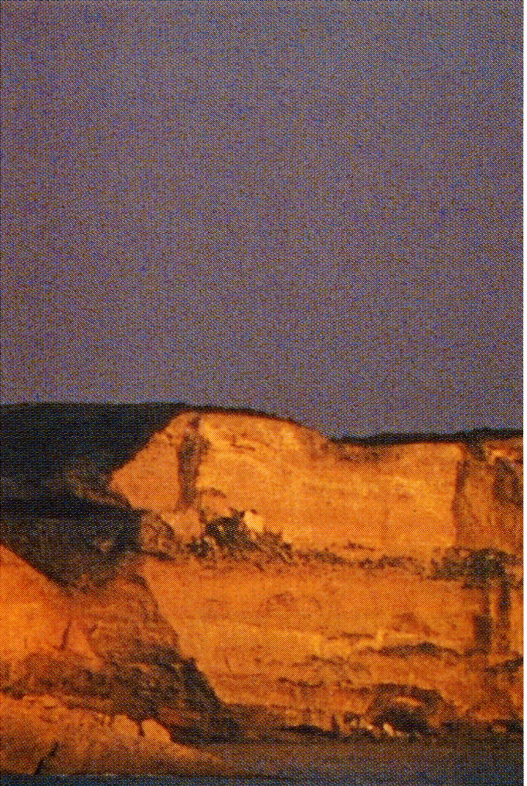
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France's Imperial Island

CORSICA



YEARS AFTER EXILE FROM HIS NATIVE ISLAND, NAPOLEON SAID, "I WOULD RECOGNIZE CORSICA, BLINDFOLDED, BY HER SCENT ALONE". AS SOON AS I STEPPED OFF THE PLANE, I KNEW WHAT NAPOLEON MEANT, FOR I WAS AWASH IN A WILD, SWEET FRAGRANCE, THE ETHER OF LONGING AND REGRET. THAT SCENT IS NOTHING MORE THAN THE AROMA OF THE "MAQUIS", THE THORNY, IMPENETRABLE BRUSH THAT IS FOUND ALL OVER CORSICA BELOW 800 METRES.

LATE AFTERNOON NEAR BONIFACIO

Botanically, the "maquis" is a tangle of shrubby trees such as juniper and holm oak, myrtle and box, mastic and arbutus; of flowers like broom and dwarf laurel, asphodel and cyclamen; of perfumed herbs like sweetbriar and rosemary, lavender and thyme.

An 80-by-160 kilometre island in the Mediterranean, straight south of Genoa and straight west of Rome, Corsica seems at first to mimic other European settings. The names of the towns - Ajaccio, Bonifacio, Propriano, Bastia- look Italian on the map. The trackless, white-sand beaches could belong to the Greek isles.

The people, however, are a mixture of French, Italian, Arab and indigenes whose roots are lost in prehistory. The language has more affinity with medieval Tuscan than with any living tongue.

Corsica, today, amounts to an alternative Riviera, only half as expensive as the spas of the French and Italian coasts. Here, it is still possible to camp wherever you like, a freedom long since denied most Europeans. Here you may still walk a pine-needled trail to an empty beach, where the whole day long no other wanderers intrude on your thoughts. And here, in reticent towns whose foundations were raised in Roman times, the lives of fishermen and farmers still overrule the posturing of tourism.

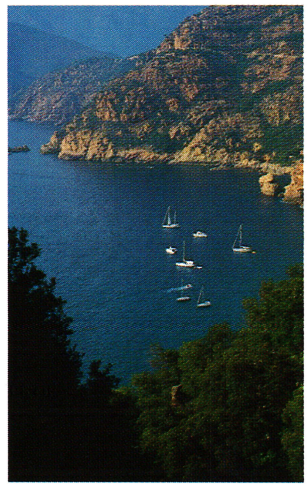
For more than two millennia, Corsicans have fought for freedom not only from the Germans, but also against a succession of foreign oppressors - Romans, Pisans, Genoese, French, and even British - but for the last 225 years, save for two years of British occupation and one year of the Nazis, Corsica has "belonged" to France.

As a North American, I was greeted with old-fashioned civility wherever I went, and I felt more welcome on the Isle of Beauty than I have on visits to west Texas or downeast Maine. Each night I slept in a different town: brown and stately Bastia, fortress of the Genoese tyranny; secretive Porto, whose bay looks through a granite gunsight toward the ocean of the Hesperides; Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon, landlocked Corte, ancient capital of Corsica; Propriano, where French nymphs swim in the bay at sunset; and astounding Bonifacio, on the southern tip of the island, crowded atop a giant pedestal of overhanging limestone that crumbles away, inches each year, under the wear of waves and wind.

Where was I from, the bartender asked me with boozy bluntness, and what was I doing there? I told her I was "un journaliste Américain". The bar went suddenly quiet; the matchbooks blazed in the silence. It was, I hastily added, "La Corse touristique" that I was interested in, nothing more.



AJACCIO - STATUE OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE



SAILING BOATS IN THE GULF OF PORTO

THE OLD HARBOUR AND FORTRESS - CALVI



The customers exhaled; the laughter and drinking resumed. Nothing to do with politics, thank God, they seemed to be saying.

The island's architecture is spectacular. The rich and troubled history of Corsica is written in its buildings. From the 450 years of Genoese rule (1284-1729), the most formidable remains are the stern castles guarding such venerable towns as Bastia and Calvi. Even more striking, however, is the necklace of watchtowers that circles the coast. Built originally in response to the terrible depredations of Barbary pirates from Africa, the towers were placed with exquisite care to ensure line-of-sight signaling from one craggy cape to the next.

Crumbling and derelict, 67 of the original 85 towers still stand, looming as high as 20 metres; some lie right beside the highway, while others take a tough push through the "maquis" to reach. On the Capo di Muro, I hiked to one of the finest of these towers. As a thunderstorm passed overhead, I hid in the "maquis" like an outlaw, for the tower was a perfect lightning-rod. After the storm, perhaps foolishly, I climbed a rusted iron staircase that barely clung to the vertical stone, entered the tower, and spiraled inside it to the roof. The view that greeted me commanded eight bays and a fleet of imagined Barbary ships.

I once spent three weeks in Spanish Catalonia on an obsessive quest for Romanesque churches. On that whole trip, I found no more beautiful example than the Trinity church at Aregno in northwest Corsica.

Built in the Pisan polychrome style, it has arcades and capitals crowded with monsters and damned souls, carved with the formal rigidity that renders the Romanesque nightmare so startling nine centuries after anonymous sculptors gave shape to its fever.

The most remarkable constructions in Corsica, however, are the prehistoric stone monuments found in the southeast quadrant of the island. These include dolmens (table-like structures of huge stones), menhirs (standing stones), and alignments (rows and columns of standing stones). They date from 3500

to 1000 BC. Lost in the "maquis", most of these monuments - including the finest single site, an enigmatic complex called Filitosa - were only rediscovered after 1950.

The eerie menhirs at Filitosa, graved with shallow human visages and long swords, were, along with the circular fortresses pierced by underground rooms at Cucuruzzu and Alo Bisucce, the most stunning monuments that I viewed.

As I drove the relentlessly twisting roads, my arms grew weary at the wheel. Except for New Guinea, no land that I have travelled is more physically convoluted than Corsica. The place, however, is made for the hiker. Above 800 metres, the "maquis" gives out and the country opens up, with grassy heaths patchworked among forests of graceful laricio pines.

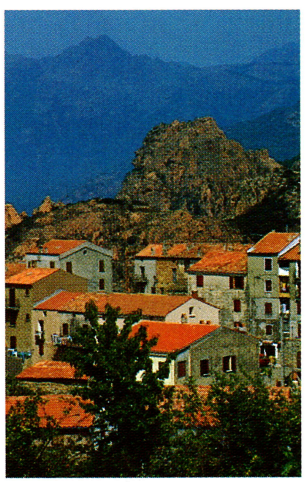
If I had one regret in Corsica, it was that I did not save enough time for hiking. An easy walk in the Gorges de Spelunca tantalized me with wanderlust. The hand-crafted trail was no modern construction, but a mule track dating at least to medieval times. The Genoese bridges, that crossed the gorge stood solid and usable, after some five centuries of thoroughfare. Before the 20th century, trails such as these were the island's only highways.

Corsica is also one of the rockiest places in Europe. Most of the stone is granite, ranging in hue from purple, through rose to ochre and yellow. In place - especially on the west-coast cliffs called Los Calanche - the rock has been tortured by erosion into a phantasmagoria of exotic shapes.

From the cliffs overlooking the sea, I was drawn to the beaches. Although for some reason I have never learned how to swim, I performed some expert wading in the Golfe de Valinco and the Golfe de Roccapina. Because so much of the coastline cannot be reached by road, Corsica lures serious yachtsmen from all over Europe, who cove-hop around the island, live on their boats in the harbors, and escape reality for weeks at a time.

At Roccapina, I strolled on the mauve sand and watched the gulls wheel over the crashing waves. A trio of German hippies passed by skipping stones, then the beach was mine again. It was mid-October. In Nice and Cannes, Antibes and Portofino, the hotels would be shuttering for winter, the beach deserted but for elderly "pensionnaires" walking their dogs. Here, the sun was hot and the sea was tepid. In shorts and T-shirt, I reclined on the sand and gazed at a distant Genoese tower. A spirit of Corsican anarchy was upon me. There was nothing better in life, it urged, than to loll here for another hour or two, and perhaps to open a bottle of "patrimonio".

Text: David Roberts, Universal Press syndicate

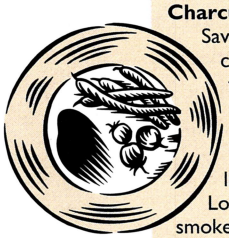


MOUNTAIN CITY OF PIANA



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THE GOURMET'S CORNER



Charcuterie
Savoury Corsican charcuterie is obtained from pork fed on acorns and wild roots. The wide selection available includes Figatelle (grilled liver sausage), Coppa and Lonzo (sausages and ham smoked over a chestnut-wood fire), black pudding, blackbird terrines and pâtés.

Wine
Corsica supplies quality wines, as well as many excellent Vins de Pays.
Some areas of production are entitled to add the name of the region to the above Appellation: Patrimonio, Côteaux d'Ajaccio, Sartène, Calvi, Côteaux du Cap Corse, Figari, Porto-Vecchio. The fragrant white wines, which are often dry, have considerable elegance. The deep-colored rosé wines are fruity. The robust, heady, red wines have remarkable bouquet.

Cheese
Corsican goat and ewe cheeses are famous. Bruccio is a fresh cream cheese delicious with chestnut-flour beignets. The rectangular Niolo has a strong, piquant flavor.



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A LAND FOR ALL SEASONS

Coming out of the mountains days later, I had a similar experience, only in reverse. Just before departing chilly Grenoble I pulled on a cardigan sweater and took the cable car up to the Bastille, the old fortress that looms over the city on the right bank of the Isère River. An hour later, I was in my car and heading south toward the Drôme region. Pine forests gave way to groves of apricot and peach trees as I drove, the festive orange fruit reminding me of miniature lanterns. By late afternoon, when I arrived in Nyons, it was boiling. Only a gently teasing breeze scented with lavender relieved the intense heat. I slipped into the hotel pool to cool off and watched the leaves of the knobby old olive trees turn silver in the setting sun.

Come here at any time of year and you'll find that such dramatic juxtapositions are the very essence of the Rhône-Alps region of France. The scenery, the weather, the people, even the food are enchantingly diverse.



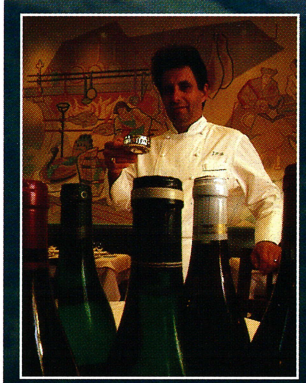
THE CITY OF LYON

LYON

Lyon is the city for people who really love France. All the glories of French urban life - the cafés, the boutiques, the architecture, the thriving cultural life - are found here. Nevertheless, alone among the major cities of France, Lyon relates vitally to the surrounding countryside; it is intensely and delightfully French in spirit.

With all due respect to the city's impressive symphonic and operatic offerings, the real music of Lyon is the clatter of knives and forks. Wander through Vieux Lyon, the handsome quarter that constitutes the largest surviving assemblage of Renaissance architecture in France, and you'll be tantalized as much by the aromas wafting out into the street as by the pretty doorways and twisting streets.

Lyon also has superb museums, including the Musée Gallo-Romain (the Romans founded the city, which they called Lugdunum, in 43 B.C.), the Musée des tissus (Textiles), and the Musée des Beaux Arts (currently in the midst of a massive renovation), the most important fine-arts museum in France after the Louvre.





ATHLETES AND AESTHETES, WINE-LOVERS, LITERATURE BUFFS AND THE ARMCHAIR ARCHEOLOGIST - THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE IN RHÔNE-ALPS.

NOTHING HAD PREPARED ME FOR THE MERCURIAL TEMPERAMENT OF RHÔNE-ALPS. IT WAS A VERY MILD FALL DAY WHEN I LEFT THE MEDIEVAL FISHING VILLAGE OF YVOIRE, A CHARMING ENCLAVE OF FLOWER-DECKED HOUSES HUGGING LAKE GENEVA'S SHORE, AND HEADED SOUTH TOWARD ANNECY ON A BACK ROAD THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS. JUST OUTSIDE THORENS-GLIERES, I SENSED FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT THE AIR HAD GROWN STILL AND THICK WITH FOREBODING. THE SKY WENT SOOT BLACK, THUNDER ROLLED, THE RAIN CAME. AND JUST AS SUDDENLY IT WAS OVER. THE VIOLENT DOWNPOUR LASTED NOT MORE THAN TEN MINUTES. NOW ALL WAS CALM AND SUNNY AGAIN. A PAINTBOX RAINBOW BRIDGED THE SHIMMERING GREEN VALLEY. FAT BROWN AND WHITE COWS STOOD STEAMING ON THE MOUNTAINSIDES.

LES DOMBES AND BOURG-EN-BRESSE

In autumn, the blooming fruit trees on the slopes below the stone village of Pérouges are clouds of pink and white. Pérouges grew rich from weaving linen in the Middle Ages; it was restored in 1911 and today presents an unusually authentic picture of the past.

North of Pérouges, the din of migrating geese announces that you are entering the vast marshes of Les Dombes. The bird sanctuary at Villars-les-Dombes, abutting a 515-acre reserve, will give any bird-watcher's binoculars a good workout.



BUSY PEDESTRIAN STREET IN LYON

Bourg-en-Bresse, the largest city in the Ain, as this region is called, is famed throughout Europe for its poultry, especially poulets de Bresse, incredibly succulent chickens distinguished by their snowy feathers and bright blue feet.

EVIAN TO CHAMONIX

Traced with rivers such as the Rhône, the Saône, the Isère and the Loire; refreshed with lakes including Geneva, Bourget and Annecy; and bubbling with spas, Rhône-Alps is a favorite gateway of pleasure-loving people.

Pretty Lake Nantua, close to the town of the same name, is revered among chefs the world over as the home of one of the most luscious sauces in French cuisine: Nantua sauce is a blend of butter, cream, crayfish and truffles, all locally available, of course.

A stylish spa town with charming vestiges of its original fin de siècle architecture, Evian-les-Bains boasts one of the last truly grand hotels surviving in Europe: the Royal Hotel is a magnificent place set down in acres of lawn and forest overlooking the lake.

Chamonix attracts yearly hordes of downhill and cross-country skiers, as well as mountain-climbers bent on scaling the summit of spectacular Mont-Blanc. Skiing in the Alps is unique and unforgettable. Pristine trails wind through villages that are beguiling under their snowy blankets. Smoke curling from stone chimneys beckons you in.



LAKE OF ANNECY

Thanks to the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville, the entire Alpine region enjoys the most modern infrastructure of any winter sports region in Europe. The Vanoise was established in 1963, the first park of its kind in France to preserve the Alpine forests. It has become a wildlife refuge and a favorite haunt of nature-loving hikers and cross-country skiers, who keep a sharp eye out for ibex, chamois and blue hare.

ANNECY TO VERCORS

Among the most charming resorts in France, Annecy and its environs, notably the blissful village of Talloires, offer an enormous variety of things to do and see. You can walk the old quarter and its canals in the morning, then, if you're lucky, catch the every-other-Saturday market, and in the afternoon sail the clearest lake in Europe.

The poet Lamartine rhapsodized about the beauty of the swan-tufted Lac du Bourget, site of Aix-les-Bains, one of the most fashionable spas in France ever since it was developed by the Romans over 2,000 years ago.

Chambéry, the capital of Savoy when this region was an independent duchy, is a handsome city with aristocratic airs and a distinctly Italianate feel. Then head back into the mountains, and explore the gorgeous, wooded Chartreuse. The Carthusian monks still produce their famous gold and green Chartreuse liqueur here.

There's always something going on in Grenoble, known in France as a hip university town with a lively cultural life and a growing high-technology sector, known in America as a winter-sports mecca and the site of the 1969 Winter Olympics.

The Parc Régional du Vercors, an immense wilderness tract just outside Grenoble, belies the image of France as a rigorously-manicured country. Pretty, snug mountain villages such as Pont-en-Royans seem to hang in midair. Do as the Grenoblois do on weekends: go to the old cast-iron market in the heart of the city to assemble a picnic, and then get lost in the Vercors.

SOUTH TO THE SUN

If this whole region is seasoned with a "brin du sud", or a dose of the south, it's Drôme and the Ardèche that feel the most emphatically Latin. The southern-most department of the Rhône-Alps region, the lavender-scented Drôme contains some of the oldest vineyards in France. The world-renowned University of Wine is located here, in a captivating Renaissance château on the edge of Suze-la-Rousse.

Montélimar, fast on the banks of the Rhône, means nougat to the French (much as Atlantic City means salt-water taffy to Americans), while Nyons has for centuries been famous for its olives and olive oil. Visit the old mill for a fascinating lesson in the production and uses of this most venerable of oils. And don't miss the stunning château at Grignan where Mme de Sévigné wrote many of her famous letters.

THE ARDÈCHE AND RHÔNE VALLEY

Leaving the verdure of the Rhône Valley, the wildness of the Ardèche comes as a bit of a shock. The most impressive bridge in the Ardèche valley, the Pont d'Arc, is not man-made but hewn out of the soft limestone by wind and water. The same currents still course through the breathtaking gorges today. The tiny, gray-stone village of Balazuc wears a rather grim visage, while the medieval village and castle at Voguë, restored in the 17th century, feel almost festive; the mood in the old-fashioned spa town of Vals-les-Bains is absolutely balmy, while nearby Aubenas, dramatically sited on a hilltop crowned by an impressive château, is a bustling mini-metropolis.

THE LOIRE AND THE BEAUJOLAIS

Just off the main road to Roanne, in the town of St-Étienne, look for an unusual, low, black building. Itself, a work of art, this impressive structure happens to house one of the most important collections of modern art in Europe. You'll know nearby Montbrison, once the commercial hub of the Loire Valley, by its brooding château perched high on a volcanic ridge.

The medieval castle at La Bastide d'Urfé was renovated in Italian Renaissance style in the 16th century. It's quite lovely, especially the painted chapel and equestrian gallery. Visit Pommier, a fortified medieval town, before stopping for something to eat at Roanne, one of the great food towns of France. At nearby Charlieu, a lovely little village; where everything seems to have been built from soft, ginger-colored stone, explore the ruins of the Romanesque Benedictine Abbey, especially the superb 12th-century carvings in the narthex.

At harvest time, the vineyards of Beaujolais are filled with pickers toting big plastic buckets. Don't be shy about tasting the wines. I was fortunate to encounter a friendly winemaker who plunged his copper "carrot" into a vat of dripping grapes so that I could taste the paradis, the first issue of juice from fermenting grapes. Magnifique!

Text: Alexander Lobrano



DENT DE CROLLES - MASSIF DE LA CHARTREUSE



VALLON PONT D'ARC



INVITATION TO A GOOD MEAL

THE GOURMET'S CORNER

Lyon and its sausages, the Bugey with its marc and liqueur brandy, the Bresse and its poultry, the Dombes and its fish, Montélimar and its nougat, Romans with its ravioles and pognes, Ardèche and its chestnuts, Grenoble with its walnuts and Chartreuse liqueur.
Their Ambassadors, Alain Chapel, Georges Blanc, Paul Bocuse, Jacques Pic and Troisgros have raised, by their talent and inventive spirit, the renown of regional gastronomy to the heights of world cuisine.

Wines and cheeses cannot be numbered and must be savoured just like landscapes. From north to south, Bugey and Savoy, Côtes Roannaises, Condrieu, Beaujolais, Côte du Rhône, Plateaux de l'Ardèche and Diois make your heads spin. Beaujolais Nouveau, Chiroubles, Côte Rôtie, Croze Hermitage, Château Grillet, Saint Amour, Saint Joseph, it's enough to make a saint sin!





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MAPS AND GUIDES



BURGUNDY

A LOT MORE THAN JUST WINE

Did you know the line used by the T.G.V. - France's high speed train - runs very close to Montréal? Indeed it does, but in this case, Montréal is a village in Burgundy. It is also a fact that the people of this region of north eastern France are familiar with river logging. On a previous trip, I visited the museum dedicated to this activity in Clamecy. In the entrance was a large photograph showing thousands of logs floating on a large expense of water. It struck me how much it was reminiscent of Canada.

River logging on the Yonne and its tributaries began in the 16th century and continued well into the 1930s. The trees felled in the thick forests of the Morvan hills were floated down river to Clamecy. There, they were bundled up into huge rafts and sent drifting in the current all the way to the river Seine and Paris, where they supplied heating and industrial fuel for a growing population. And the equipment and methods used were absolutely similar to Canada's.

CLUNY ABBEY

HOSPICES DE BEAUNE



DIJON AND ITS FAMOUS MUSTARD



Today, logging is just a thing of the past and the work boats that plied the rivers and canals have made way for pleasure crafts, from hotel barges to rental day cruisers available throughout a network of some 2,200 km of navigable waterways.

On this particular trip, I had started out from Nevers with friends who had crossed the Atlantic in their cutter and were heading towards the Mediterranean. We had a smooth voyage through part of Burgundy, moving slowly from lock to lock.



WINE TASTING IS SERIOUS BUSINESS IN BURGUNDY

This large and diverse region, with its carefully balanced blend of plains, plateaux hills and river valleys, resembles a mosaïc, the pieces of which are held together not by geography but by a long and common history, still highly visible in many places.

Travelling through Burgundy is a bit like moving through a history book, from prehistoric times to the 21st century, by way of the Roman occupation, Gauls, the age of the great monasteries and the Grand Dukes.

How far back does it go? Well, I once had the opportunity to interview the great prehistorian Leroy-Gourthan, on the site of an archeological dig. Inside a cave in the valley of the Cure, a beautiful river with rapids that delight canoë and kayak lovers, he showed me the freshly excavated remains of animals who lived in the Ice Age and drawings of bisons, mammoths and horses on the rock wall, proof that humans occupied the area 50,000 years before our time. If you are a buff, don't miss visiting the museum at Sens, housed in the superb synod palace beside the cathedral.

This distant past has been the inspiration behind the construction of the Archéodrome, alongside the A6 highway. Imagine a permanent exhibit recreating the various types of homesteads, used in Burgundy throughout the ages. After undergoing a complete renovation, it did reopen in 1993.

And what about the Gauls? We find them entrenched at Alise-Sainte-Reine, once known as Alesia. The Roman siege of the city led by Caesar himself brought to an end the resistance of the local tribes under the command of Vercingetorix. His equestrian statue has been erected between two valleys on Mont Auxois. This area had already sustained human occupation well before the Romans. A tribe of skillful metal workers had taken advantage of its location on the pewter route between the British Isles and Greece to invent the process of metal plating and to perfect techniques of fashioning iron. These were passed on to their descendants who put them to good use in the 18th century near the city of Trois-Rivières, Québec. But how ?

Well, to the north of Dijon, in a romantic valley where the river Seine is born, we come to the village of Saint-Seine-L'Abbaye, famous for its small forges. Here, like in many other places throughout Burgundy, the presence of iron ore, with forests capable of supplying large quantities of charcoal and water mills to provide power to the forge bellows and hammers, made it possible for a new industry to grow and prosper.

Lord Maurice Poulin, a civil servant during the reign of Louis XIV, owned the domain of Francheville. He was sent to Canada where he stayed and acquired a vast piece of land beside a powerful river. It is now called the Saint-Maurice because of Poulin de Francheville's first name.

This is not, however, the end of the story. Poulin had noticed that the soil on his plot was the same brown colour as that in his native Burgundy. He understood the soil contained iron and had a sample shipped to France for analysis. He was right! Later, his grandson obtained the rights to the ore deposit and thus were born the Forges of Saint-Maurice, the very first iron and steel works in North America.

Near Montbard, one finds the Buffon forges. Completely restored, they constitute a striking example of 18th-century steel-making, complete with furnaces, water powered forges, maintenance buildings, lodgings for the master founders, blacksmiths and their workers, not to forget the elegant pavilion used by the creator of it all, the great author and naturalist, George Louis de Buffon.



TANLAY CASTLE

Another landmark not to be missed is the huge Fontenay Abbey, a masterpiece of Roman cistercian art of the 12th century. The actual owner greets visitors himself and shows them proudly through the buildings and the immaculate grounds, giving, on the way, enlightening accounts of a

monastic life dedicated to prayer, study and manual labour: iron work. It was upon leaving Fontenay that we spotted a colorful hot air balloon drifting slowly across the sky. Perhaps some tourists had taken to the air since excursions of this type are widely available throughout Burgundy. A most interesting coincidence is that our guide was a descendant of Montgolfier, the inventor of the hot air balloon.

In the town of Châtillon-sur-Seine, we visited a home containing one of the region's most famous archeological finds. It is a crucible discovered in Vix, buried inside a princess tomb. This bronze vase is 1.65 m high with wonderfully decorated rim and handles. Gold, jewels, bronze and parts of a ceremonial chariot are also on display.

Ancy-le-Franc is worth a visit because of its Renaissance castle. Semur-en-Auxois, a fully fledged medieval city, leads on towards Montréal-en-Bourgogne. Here, a mere handful of inhabitants live perched on a hill beneath the crumbling walls of a feudal castle. We found the little church quite interesting with its sculpted oak stalls portraying country life in years gone by.

No visit to this region is complete without a stop in Vézelay. A walk up the steeply sloped streets on a beautiful evening is a must. The sunset illuminates the golden façade of the Sainte-Madeleine Basilica. The second porch lies inside, well protected from the abuse of weather and looks brand new, even four centuries later. Here, Christ is depicted in all his glory, surrounded by all the symbols which medieval minds could imagine. As you walk through the large nave, you'll notice the ten tall columns which support it on both sides. Look closely at the capitals. Marvelous! From the top of the church tower, we could see the valley of the river Cure and further away, the Auxerrois and Morvan hills.

Seen from the banks of the river Yonne, Auxerre offers a panoramic view over its roof tops and steeples. Across the bridge, one finds the city's old quarters, a Gothic cathedral, a Roman crypt and a former abbey with interesting frescoes from the Carolingian era. Auxerre is also the gateway to the Chablis wine region, one of the most famous in the whole of Burgundy.







FONTENAY ABBEY

CITY OF SEMUR-EN-AUXOIS

CRUISING ON THE BURGUNDY CANAL

The Côte d'Or is where serious things get started in the wine business. First comes Dijon, elegant capital of the Dukes of Burgundy. I would recommend a visit (on foot) of the old quarters featuring many half-timbered homes. High on the list are the Duke's palace and the fine arts museum.

Then, we move on to Côte de Nuits, Côte de Beaune, Côte Châlonnaise and Maconnais. It is like a roll call of the very best vintages the world can offer. If your head is still clear enough after several "tastings", ask a local wine grower about the different varieties of grapes, the quality labelling, the art of wine making, the influence of weather, soil and location. In a word, all that makes a great Burgundy vintage the world's very best.

The Romans planted the first vineyards here to be later improved by the monks at the time of the great abbeys, much to the delight of wine lovers who have celebrated them ever since.

However, don't let yourself be discouraged by all this fancy talk about wine. If the only truth you like is straight out of a bottle, then a simple knock on any wine maker's door will give you access to his cellar and an opportunity to sample the harvest while learning everything there is to know about skills passed on from generation to generation.

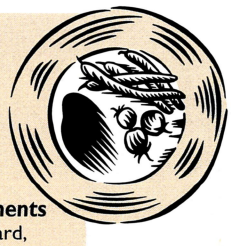
Further South, near Mâcon, lie the imposing ruins of the once spectacular Abbaye de Cluny. Looking at them today, it is difficult to imagine the former splendor of the monastic community who lived there. In the 10th century, its abbots wanted to build the largest religious monument in the whole of Christendom, the most grandiose church with the highest steeple and the richest decoration. Their vow became reality a mere century later. Although decadence and destruction were to do their work, what remains today still takes one's breath away.

Here, in the southern tip of Burgundy, one can already feel the approaching warmth of the Rhône Valley and a light that grows gradually more mediterranean. In these parts, every little district bears a name to make anyone's mouth water: Bresse evokes fine poultry; Morvan, superb cold meats and pâtés; Charolais, beef that is the epitomy of taste and tender-

ness; and last but not least, Beaujolais. But you know all about that...

Beaune is another unavoidable stop. It is the undisputed wine capital of Burgundy. As the most important trading center in this much sought after commodity, Beaune merchants could afford to be generous and thus gave the city some remarkable buildings. First and foremost are the famous Hospices de Beaune. This 15th-century hospital was built and financed by the chancellor of a Duke of Burgundy to honor his wife. Nicolas Rolin (the benefactor) wanted the sick to be cared for as if they were kings, so he stipulated that the rooms be comfortable, decorated with beautiful tapestries and paintings from one of the great master of the time. The style of the building was inspired by the Burgundy Flemish school, with slate roofs inlaid with glazed tiles arranged in a diamond shape, and adorned with a profusion of bell-turrets and tall chimneys.

The Gourmet's Corner



Burgundy wines
The Burgundy wine region begins to the south of Dijon and ends on the outskirts of Mâcon. This is where the great vintages come from: Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune. It is impossible to mention the names of all these red and white wines. Here are a few of the most important.

Côtes de Nuits: Chambertin, Musigny, Clos de Vougeot, Romanée-Conti, Nuits-Saint-Georges.

Côtes de Beaune: Volnay, Pommard, Aloxe-Corton, Corton-Charlemagne, Beaune, Meursault, Montrachet, Savigny, Mercurey, Givry, etc.

The Appellation Crémant de Bourgogne applies to sparkling wines made from wine produced in the statutory Burgundy wine-producing area. It is a delicious pétillant wine just a little lively.

Mustards and condiments
The famous Dijon mustard, ready-made sauces, gherkins and mixed pickles are essential accompaniments to every meal.

Burgundy snails
Snails are prepared in accordance with the Burgundy method and are served very hot. They make a good starter to a special meal.

Crème de Cassis
Crème de Cassis is a liqueur which can be drunk alone or mixed with other drinks: "Kir", a popular aperitif, is made by mixing one-fifth crème de cassis with four-fifths Bourgogne Aligoté.



GREAT FARE!

Some thirty odd kilometres from Beaune, one comes face to face with the imposing gate leading to the Clos de Vougeot, sitting like a flagship in the middle of an ocean of vineyards. The chateau of Clos de Vougeot was built in the Middle Ages and enlarged by cistercians monks during the Renaissance. The monks are no longer there, but you can still visit their living quarters, giant wine presses and old oak vats. This most impressive domain belongs to the Brotherhood of the Tastevins who regularly organizes dinners for up to 500 guests - but on a private basis only.

The church of Tournus is curiously framed by round and square towers, giving it more than a passing resemblance to a fortress. Yet, inside this romanesque sanctuary, the interplay of light and shadow and the pink limestone nave creates a compelling invitation to meditation.

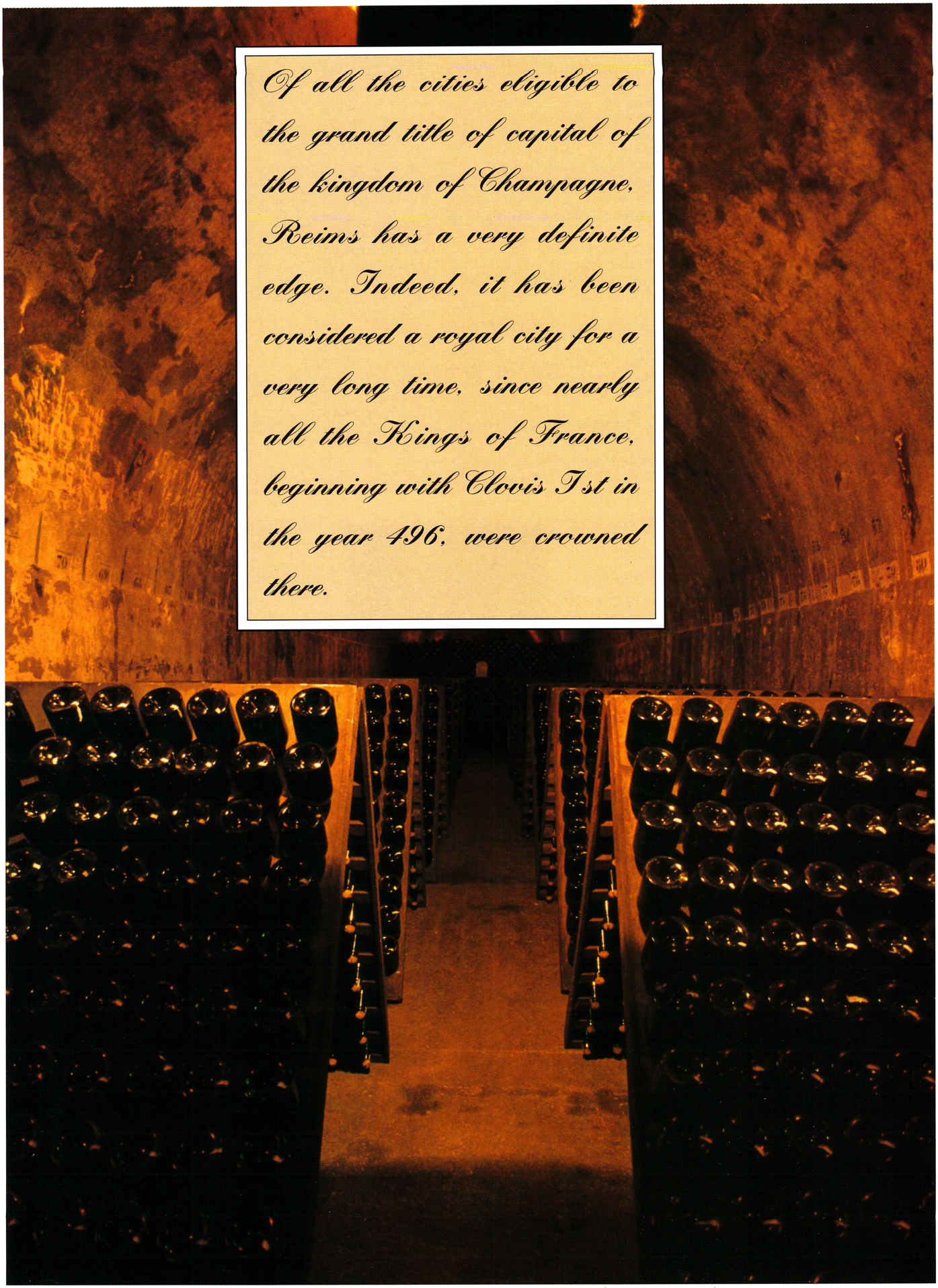
Another large and more recent religious site is the monastic community of Taizé, an heritage from the days of the Protestant Reform.

Burgundy's other claim to fame is its gastronomy. Here, Michelin-starred restaurants seem to fill most pages in the serious guidebooks dedicated to the subtle art of good eating. Listing them all would be an impossible task, just as it would be for their more modest counterparts where food is always delicious and the wine list extensive. If you should find yourself unable to cope with the choices offered, here's a tip - just call the owner and ask him with a wink to bring you a carafe of the very house wine he likes to drink in the company of his friends. He will quickly understand and you'll never be disappointed.

Text: Louis-Martin Tard

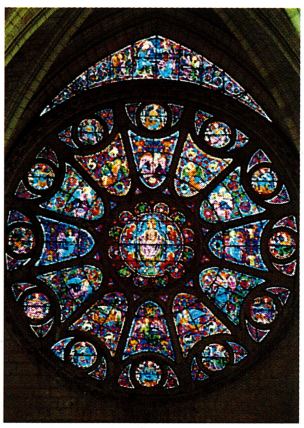


MICHELIN®
MAPS AND GUIDES



Of all the cities eligible to the grand title of capital of the kingdom of Champagne, Reims has a very definite edge. Indeed, it has been considered a royal city for a very long time, since nearly all the Kings of France, beginning with Clovis 1st in the year 496, were crowned there.

The secrets of the MAGIC FLUTE



STAINED GLASS WINDOW - REIMS CATHEDRAL

Tour guides point out that Reims Cathedral is an example of pure unadulterated gothic style. The fact that it was built over a relatively short period of time accounts for the perfect architectural harmony achieved by its medieval builders. Nearly 2,300 statues, including the famous smiling angel, adorn its exterior. The cathedral was bombed several times during the First World War and, come 1918, all that was left was a burnt out shell. However, thanks to the financial contribution of John D. Rockefeller, it has been restored to its former splendour.

The tympanums of the doorways are unusually decorated with stained glass. Contrary to the accepted custom, that of the center is dedicated to the Virgin Mary instead of Christ. It also features a double rosace. A unique collection of 16th-century tapestries is housed inside and to the rear, one can marvel at Chagall's glass work with its remarkably intense blues. Adjacent to the cathedral is the Tau palace which holds the cathedral's treasure.

If Notre-Dame de Reims is an example of the purity of gothic style, then the Saint-Rémi Basilica exudes simplicity with its very long, stark nave.

Also worth a visit, the Gate of Mars, a gallo-roman triumphal arch and the city's old quarters.

But there is also a secret city which hides and spreads below ground. There, kilometres upon kilometres of tunnels have been dug out of the chalk. Tourists can board small electric trains to discover millions of "cols" (col is the name given to the various types of bottles containing Champagne).

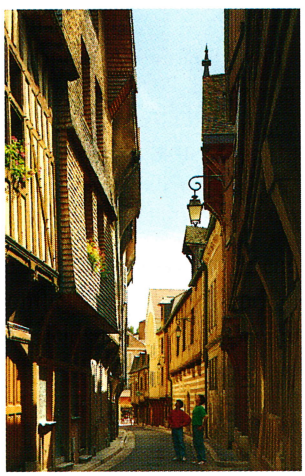
Épernay is another regional metropolis, hiding behind the Montagne de Reims, a large limestone hill covered by vineyards. Part of the plateau that lies on top is dotted with clumps of trees and a scattering of marshes and bogs, and has been partly turned into a regional park. Close to the village of Verzy, one finds a very mysterious and very old beech forest. The trees spread a jungle of twisted and knotty limbs as if in untold agony. Upon leaving this eerie place, we return to a hill top view showing the orderly rows of vineyards and in the distance, the beckoning towers of Reims Cathedral.

Still more tunnels lie under the streets of Épernay. Here, experts relentlessly look after the wine to ensure it will reach its full potential. Tour guides are on hand to comment on the various techniques used and to pop the corks for the tasting that usually follows.

At the other tip of this "sacred triangle" stands the city of Châlons-sur-Marne. The best itinerary to reach it cuts through the very heart of the Champagne vineyards, where every producing acre commands a phenomenal price tag. Châlons offers an interesting collection of old half-timbered houses lined up alongside canals spanned by myriads of small bridges. The St-Etienne Cathedral is worth a detour, just like the Notre-Dame-en-Vaux Basilica, with its cloister museum and the tombstone of Jean Talon, first administrator of New France. Close by, a large painting by Claude François, known in Canada as Brother Luc. He was a friend of Jean Talon and painted his portrait now hanging in the Hôtel Dieu Museum in Québec City.

Châlons was also the birthplace of Paul Le Jeune. He became a Jesuit and was sent to Canada. Like all his fellow missionaries, he wrote his "Relations". These reports were first addressed to his superiors and subsequently printed and read by the devout of the upper class during the reign of Louis XIII. A great reporter of his time, Le Jeune describes his travels in wild, untamed regions, giving vivid accounts of the miseries endured by the North American Indians and asking his compatriots to show compassion for the natives. His appeal was well received and led to the foundation of Ville-Marie, today's Montréal.

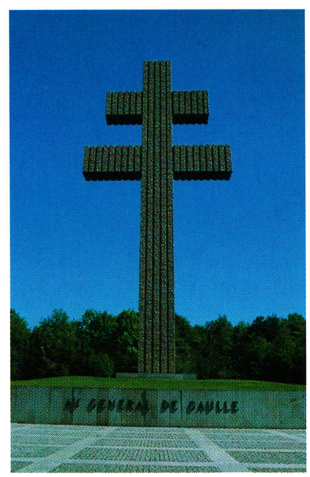
As you might have guessed, I'm touring the Champagne region to gather information for an article about the origins of the city of Montréal. Five people are featured on my list. After Paul Le Jeune, Jeanne Mance comes next. So I'm heading for Langres, her birthplace.



OLD HOUSES IN TROYES

Upon leaving Châlons, the majestic outline of Notre-Dame de l'Épine suddenly appears on the horizon. This shrine, revered throughout the ages, has a near cathedral-like majesty. Its façade is very ornate Gothic, somewhat softened by a touch of Renaissance. Unusual gargoyles circle the roof; the most surprising one depicts a sow playing the harp.

The valley of the river Marne is now peaceful after so many centuries of conflict and destruction. Poplars line the river banks and wheat fields blanket the ground as far as the eye can see.



COLOMBEY-LES-DEUX-ÉGLISES MEMORIAL TO GENERAL DE GAULLE

Perched high on the ridge of a plateau, Langres is the hydrological center of France. From here, rivers will either run west towards the Seine and the Channel, North to the North Sea via the river Meuse, or South to the Mediterranean via the river Saône. This was the place Jeanne Mance left behind to accomplish her destiny in Canada. In her thirties, a professional healer by training, single and not religious, she had read the "Relations" written by Le Jeune. Deeply moved, she decided to go to Canada to take care of the native people. She left in May of 1640, probably becoming, in doing so, an early version of the modern day "nurse without borders".

Langres remains, today, the fortified city she left over three and a half centuries ago. It is still surrounded by walls so old they even include a Gallo-Roman arch. A walk along the three kilometre circular watch-path, through a maze of towers will give you a commanding view as far as the Vosges mountains and sometimes even to the Jungfrau in the Swiss Alps. Near the majestic cathedral of Saint-Mammes, a statue of Jeanne Mance bears witness to her accomplishments.

Philosopher Denis Diderot, another prodigal son of Langres, is also on the honour list, with a statue bearing the signature of Bartholdi, the author of the Statue of Liberty of New York fame.

Following a foot loose and fancy-free itinerary, we head for the village of Colombey-les-Deux Églises, resting place of General de Gaulle. His home has been turned into a museum and a huge cross made of concrete stands proudly on a hill top.

Next stop, the forest of Lac d'Orient. It is part of the vast network of reservoirs (over 25,000 acres in all), built in this area of Champagne to regulate the water flow of the tributaries to the river Seine. Beaches and marinas make it a very popular weekend and vacation spot with the locals.



A TYPICAL VILLAGE IN CHAMPAGNE

Then comes Chaource, made famous by its cheese. It is a soft cheese with a washed rind and a pleasant taste somewhat reminiscent of hazelnut. In the church of St-Jean Baptiste, a polychrome entombment featuring seven figures surrounding the body of Christ.

In the rugged country of Othe covered with thick forests near the southwest corner of Champagne, I came across the trail of the major player in the "Group of Five", Paul Chomedey, Lord of Maisonneuve. Neuville-sur-Vanne is a



A KING'S RANSOM!

tiny village. Just a handful of houses surrounded by fields and apple orchards. Inside the church dedicated to St. Martin, a wall plaque reminds visitors he was baptized here on February 16, 1612. Outside, a large oval stele underlines his leading role as the founder of Ville-Marie.

Only a stone's throw away stands his native manor. The courtyard has been turned into a vegetable garden but the moat surrounding it and the drawbridge are still well in evidence.

Paul Chomedey was single and a low ranking officer in the army. He had grown weary of waging war and was attracted by the very notion of peace. After reading and reflecting upon "Relations", he decided to set sail for Canada and later founded the city which was to become Montréal. Interestingly enough, Montréal is the only major city in the world to have been created not for strategic nor commercial purposes, but merely to serve as best could be the religious and humanitarian needs of the American Indians in the Saint Lawrence valley.

In order to carry out this plan, he needed a school teacher with the strength to overcome the many difficulties attached to the mission. He found a volunteer in Troyes.

Former capital of the province of Champagne, Troyes was miraculously spared by the war. The city center has changed very little since medieval times. Narrow streets and half-timbered houses with overhanging gables are the order of the day. But there is no need to look for Marguerite Bourgeois' house as the city planners tore it down a while back to make room for a shopping mall. The church of Saint-Jean-au-Marché where she was baptized is still intact, though; outside a wall plaque reminds us of her remarkable life while inside a wooden statue represents the future Saint surrounded by young children including an American Indian girl. Marguerite, a quiet, unassuming citizen of Troyes, was the daughter of a candle maker. She left her home town in 1653 bound for Montréal, where she was to become the first teacher and the founder of a congregation still in existence today.

Near the cathedral, the former episcopal palace with its massive stone structure and beautiful stained glass windows houses the collection put together by a local hosiery maker with an enduring passion for classical and modern paintings.

In search of the trail leading to Lambert Closse l'Ardennais, who met his death in 1662 at the hands of Iroquois warriors while defending Montréal, we head north towards the city of Sainte-Menehould. This is where the history of France could have taken a turn for the worse or at least the unexpected. But this was not to be thanks to a certain Jean-Baptiste Drouet, son of a local innkeeper who spotted King Louis XVI and his family aboard a carriage trying to flee France incognito. He gave the alarm and quickly put an end to their foolhardy attempt. But Sainte-Menehould's major claim to fame is being the birthplace of Dom



CHAMPAGNE FOR TWO?

Perignon, the inventor of Champagne. A contemporary of Louis XIV, he was in charge of the wine cellars at the nearby Benedictine abbey of Hautvilliers. There, he discovered how to transform a bubbly plonk called devil wine or cork popping wine into the marvelous drink we know today as Champagne.

Local restaurants have a unique specialty on their menus: pig trotters. But they also serve such mouth-watering dishes as coquelet au Champagne, andouillettes de Troyes, ham from the Ardennes, boudin blanc from Rethel, cheese from Chaource, Langres or Rocroi. And in a region dominated by champagne, it is interesting to note the existence of other wines such as Bonzy (red) and Ryceys (rosé).

The river Meuse winds and meanders its way lazily at the bottom of a deep valley cut out of shale rock. On its northward journey, it flows through Charleville, birthplace of Rimbaud, a genial but tormented poet still considered an "enfant terrible" a century after his death in 1891. The city center is graced by a magnificent Louis XIII square lined with elegant arches. The fortress of Mézières, her twin city, stands proudly on the opposite bank.

Further downstream, another fortress, Sedan, the largest of its kind in Europe. It must have inspired Sergeant Major Closse, a soldier born in nearby Saint-Denis-de-Mogue. His bronze effigy showing him, rifle at the ready, can be found at the foot of Maisonneuve's statue in Montréal.

Other individuals of historical dimension made the trip from Champagne to Canada. Jacques Marquette, a Jesuit from Reims, explored the Mississippi and Illinois rivers in 1670. Among the first colonists to settle in Port-Royal in Acadia, Charles Turgis known as Saint-Étienne, left a large number of descendants, as did Isaac Paisseley from Cirey, ancestor of the Amirault's, Bertrand's, Lavergne's, Chiasson's, Boudrot's, Gaudret's, Girouard's, Comeau's and Trahan's.

The magic flute of Champagne is also a horn of plenty for Canadians.

Text: Louis-Martin Tard



FORTRESS OF SEDAN



LIVING IT UP IN CHAMPAGNE-ARDENNE

The Gourmet's Corner

Champagne wines
The Champagne region is known mainly for the sparkling wine to which it has given its name and which is a favorite all over the world. The wine for festive occasions, the wine of happiness, Champagne may be drunk at all hours of the day.

The Champagne wine district is divided into three main regions which produce about 200 million bottles annually: the Montagne de Reims, the Marne Valley and the Côte des Blancs.

The Champagne region also produces still wines, both red and white. Champagne Rosé is a pleasant novelty drink.

Ardennes ham
Ardennes ham is smoked ham, dark red in color and with a fine flavor. It is boned and wrapped in a net.

Pieds de Cochon (pigs' trotters à la Sainte-Ménehould)
Carefully prepared and grilled until golden, Pieds de Cochon à la Sainte-Ménehould make a hearty and appetizing meal.

Recipes
Chicken in Champagne:
Serves 6
Preparation time: 25 minutes
Cooking time: 40 minutes
Ingredients: 1 3 lb chicken, jointed, 50 g (2 oz) butter, 3 shallots, 1250 g can Champignons de Paris (chopped), 1 liqueur glass Fine Champagne (Cognac brandy), 1/2 bottle of Champagne, 1 tablespoon beurre manié (1 dessertspoon flour + 1 dessertspoon butter), 2 dl (7 oz) double cream, egg yolks, salt and pepper.

Peel and chop the shallots. Brown the chicken joints and shallots in the hot butter in a frying-pan. Add salt and pepper. Add Fine Champagne and ignite, add drained Champignons and Champagne, thicken with the beurre manié and simmer over a low heat. Mix egg yolks with cream and add the mixture to the chicken 5 minutes before the end of the cooking time. Stir with a wooden spoon until the sauce coats the spoon. Adjust seasoning. Turn into a serving dish and serve at once.



Tarte aux Mirabelles
(Mirabelle plum flan): Serves 4
Preparation time: 25 minutes
Cooking time: 35 minutes
Ingredients:
Pastry: 150 g (5 oz) flour, 75 g (2 1/2 oz) butter, 1/2 glass water, pinch of salt.
Filling: 750 g (1 1/2 lb) Mirabelle plums, 150 g (5 oz) caster sugar, 1 tablespoon flour.

Mix all the pastry ingredients with the fingertips. Roll the pastry into a ball, roll it out and line a well-buttered flan tin. Dust the bottom of the pastry case with sugar and flour, arrange the stoned plums on top, packing them in close together, dust with sugar and cook in a hot oven. When cooked, remove flan from the tin, dust with sugar and serve warm.



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THE WISDOM OF ALSACE



HAUT-KOENISBOURG CASTLE

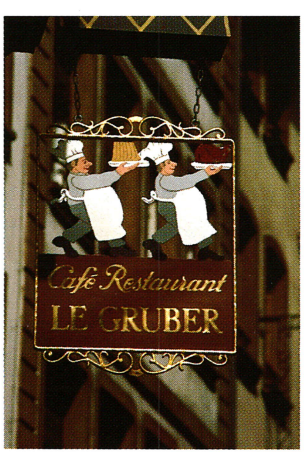


ALSACE

Here, storks and citadels, rich desserts and crisp young wines, past and present, are equally prized.

I have believed in Alsace, as one believes in ghosts or Santa Claus, ever since my parents began reading fairy tales aloud to me. My mind would wander from the story to the glorious illustrations - of narrow, cobbled streets and crooked houses with storks perched on steep tile roofs, and flowers spilling out window boxes - and I would become lost in fantasies of how it would be to actually live in such an enchanted place.

FEELING HUNGRY?



PICTURE POSTCARD FROM ALSACE



My childhood had long since passed when I first visited Alsace, but I recognized at once that its exquisite villages were my childhood fantasies brought to life. I felt a braid woven of memory and nostalgia wrap itself around me as I set out to explore their every secret treasure, not so much intent on finding Snow White or Little Red Riding Hood or a cottage full of trolls, as to meet the people of my grown-up fantasies: wine-makers and sausage-stuffers and bakers of sinfully rich onion tarts; potters and antique merchants and keepers of museums; also mountain climbers and monks.

I travelled from village to village. I could not get enough of them, strewn about the vine-covered countryside of Alsace like too many scattered jewels. I discovered a region still living in blissful harmony with the past. Flower boxes and cobbled streets and half-timbered houses and sculptured oriels and extravagant fountains - they're all here, miraculously intact and well-preserved. In Seebach and Diebolsheim, Hunspach and La Petite Pierre, Wissembourg and La Wantzenau, I was met by cheerful houses that leaned into the streets in welcome, as alive with charm and hospitality as those who swept their stoops.

At tiny Plobsheim, an old woman clutching a rosary slowly genuflected and crossed herself with holy water before slipping into a confessional. At the medieval church in Neuwiller-lès-Saverne, schoolchildren dressed in white, clustered before the altar to make their First Communion. In Ebersmunster a solitary organist filled the lovely baroque abbey with the music of Bach.

In Sélestat, I spent hours poring over ancient books at the Bibliothèque Humaniste, a magnificent library established in 1452 - two years after Gutenberg invented the printing press, and forty years before Columbus's journey to the New World. Here, I found liturgical manuscripts dating back to the 600's, a translation of Virgil done in 1400, a Greek grammar book from the 1550's, and a book written in Latin in 1507 that is said to contain the first reference to the New World as "America".



RIQUEWIRH - A REFRESHING STOP ON THE WINE ROAD

While Alsatians are deeply respectful of the past, they are anything but stuffy or morbid. Within the walls of villages like Obernai, with its maze-like streets and monuments spanning a millennium - a 13th-century belfry, a 16th-century well, the 7th-century birthplace of Saint Odile - beats a lively heart. The town of Saverne buzzes around the Château des Rohan, a grand palace rebuilt in 1781 that sprawls across the highest hill and houses a fine collection of artworks, relics and furniture. I arrived in little Marmoutier to discover that a fair was in progress, a celebration of harvest. Children rode a carousel made of dragons, and vendors sold food, balloons and stuffed animals in the shade of a 12th-century church.

Alsace's gift of holding on to yesterday while honoring today is particularly striking in Strasbourg, the home of the European Parliament and Council of Europe, a university town of 45,000 students and a major transportation and banking center. Strasbourg exults in its past - in its awesomely beautiful, rosy-hued cathedral whose lacy spire reaches up 143 meters; in its marvelous museums; in its Renaissance "old quarter", La Petite France, where remarkable half-timbered houses front narrow, winding streets and waterways.

Colmar's Renaissance quarter, La Petite Venise, is likewise astonishingly peaceful and picturesque. Here the region's last town crier still calls the hours. At the Unterlinden Museum, housed in a 13th-century convent, Mathias Grünewald's sublime 16th-century Issenheim altarpiece is on display. A quieter glory is the Batholdi Museum, showcasing works by the man who created the Statue of Liberty.

Alsace is a slender wedge, stretching about 192 kilometres from north to south and about 48 kilometres from the Rhine River on the east to the Vosges Mountains on the West. From the Vosges come timber and the region's famous rose-colored sandstone; to the Vosges go campers, hikers, and seekers of artistic and religious inspiration. On one peak stand the ruins of the 11th-century Château de Fleckenstein, hewn from rock to resemble (from a distance) a ghost ship sailing on top of the world. The austere Château du Haut-Koenigsbourg is the most famous château in Alsace. It was rebuilt by the German Kaiser, William II, at the turn of the century in the style of a medieval castle. Alsatians ascend Mt. Ste-Odile to pay tribute to their patron saint. The highest peak of all, at over 1,415 meters, is the Grand Ballon, swelling gently out of a dense forest.

Back on the plains of Alsace, not far from Haguenau, are Alsace's pottery villages. Soufflenheim has been producing glazed pottery since 1147, all of it kitchenware. Most famous are the fluted molds for kougelhopf cakes. Betschdorf has been turning out its famed blue-on-gray stoneware since the 1700's.



STRASBOURG - LITTLE FRANCE DISTRICT

The Gourmet's Corner

Alsace Wines
Along the Rhine, the Alsace wine region covers a narrow strip of land 1 to 5 km wide by 120 km long from Strasbourg to Thann.



The wines of Alsace are unusual in that they are known by the name of the grape from which they are made. They are white, dry, fruity, and are sold in the typical slender, tapered-neck bottle of Alsace. The best known varieties are Riesling, Sylvaner, Gewürztraminer and Tokay.

Choucroute
To most gourmets, Choucroute means Alsace, and the latter can certainly take pride in it.

Of all the centers producing choucroute, that of Krautergersheim, near Obernai, is one of the most important. There, the cabbage is sliced and spread out in layers in barrels, each layer being salted and compressed. After 3 to 4 weeks, the product is ready to eat.

Charcuterie
Foie gras in block form, pâté in pastry, Strasbourg sausage, smoked ham, and salami are all included in the wide selection of appetizing Charcuteries d'Alsace.

Pastries from Alsace
Kougelhopf is a tall cake, dusted with icing sugar, made from a dough consisting of butter, flour, Malaga raisins and almonds.

Alsace is also known for its hearty food and elegant wines. You haven't really had cabbage until you've tasted Alsatian choucroute garnie, a steamy, creamy version of sauerkraut with sausages and ham. Onion tarts are another specialty - and just about anything involving cream and butter. The foie gras, escargots and tarte flambée are truly delectable.

The wines of Alsace are made from seven grape varieties, nearly all of them white. The ethereal Riesling and spicy Gewürztraminer each merit a pilgrimage to the villages that make them, villages that look as though time embroided a delicate lace and draped it over the base of steep, vine-covered slopes. In lovely Eguisheim, I stopped for refreshment at one of the wine cellars along the cobbled alleys, then walked the ramparts and explored the remains of the town's famous castle and church. In Kaysersberg, narrow streets wind past Renaissance houses and across the fortified stone bridge over the pretty river La Weiss to the Albert Schweitzer Museum, housed in the legendary humanitarian's birthplace. Ribeauvillé has a wonderful 13th-century tower that used to divide the old town from the new.

Riquewihr is a walled village where so little has changed since the 1600s that the village itself is a museum. Graceful Molsheim has a grand church, fine Renaissance buildings and two museums in an old monastery. In Barr, lovely houses ring a 17th-century town hall. Its Musée de la Folie Marco is an 18th-century mansion, beautifully restored and furnished and filled with handsome pewter and pottery pieces. Thann, a Renaissance town with a brooding Witches' Tower, boasts a Gothic church whose plaster is said to have been mixed with vats of the village wine.

Mulhouse is a center of commerce and culture; textiles are made here and the city has several wonderful museums. These are devoted to history, textiles, wallpapers, trains and fire-fighting. The National Automobile Museum displays more than 500 of the most sumptuous and ingenious cars ever built, including the delightful "La Royale" of the prestigious Bugatti collection.

At Ecomusée d'Alsace in Ungersheim, a vast outdoor museum with more than 60 original Alsatian buildings, some dating back to the 12th century, I was told an intriguing story. After Alsace was occupied in 1870, the women defied their German masters by dressing only in black and wearing a black hair bow with the French tricolor, symbolizing the forced separation of a "daughter" of France from her mother country.

Gentle Alsace may be a storybook picture come-to-life - but it does not blur reality.

Text: Eunice Fried



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EXPLORING MARTINIQUE

Martinique is one of the largest islands in the Lesser Antilles or Leeward Islands. This tropical gem is 80 km long and about 34 km at its widest. To fully appreciate and explore the "Island of Flowers", seven scenic routes have been mapped out that vary in duration from a half to a full day.

All roads lead from Fort-de-France, the capital. On the north route to Prêcheur along the east coast, sightseers are treated immediately to a breathtaking picture post card view of Fort-de-France and the shimmering turquoise bay from the plateau above the port. Travelling along the coast, tourists can visit the Baroque-style, 17th-century Jesuit church at Case Pilote. From Bellefontaine, a typical fishing village on the cliffside, the route turns inland to Morne-Vert, offering grand scenic vistas of the Pitons du Carbet and the Mont Pelée volcano to the north.

Back on the coast, Le Carbet has a number of interesting attractions. It's famous for being the spot where Columbus first set foot on Martinique and where the illustrious painter Paul Gauguin resided for five months in 1887 to develop his distinctive style of painting. Nearby is the Bally Rhum distillery and the Amazona Zoological Garden, sheltering 70 animal species from the Amazon basin in Africa.



A little further north is situated one of Martinique's major tourist attractions, and the site of one of the world's most terrible natural disasters. On May 8, 1902, Mt. Pelée, a 5,000-foot active volcano blew up and within three minutes totally destroyed nearby Saint Pierre, killing all but one of its 30,000 inhabitants. Visitors can view the ruins of the grand theatre, the dungeon holding the lone survivor and the remains of the church within the fort.

A second tour, lasting a full day, takes tourists to Grand Rivière at the northern tip and then back along the Atlantic coast. The route travels across the backbone of the island, providing spectacular scenic views of the Pitons du Carbet and Morne Rouge, a jumping off point if you wish to climb Mt. Pelée.

At Ajoupa Bouillon, a village in the verdant tropical rain forest, adventurers can travel up a mini-canyon in the Gorges de la Falaise to behold a very beautiful cascading waterfall.

A BEAUTIFUL BEACH JUST WAITING FOR YOU

RUM IS PART OF MARTINIQUE'S EVERYDAY LIFE

Grand Rivière is considered one of Martinique's prettiest villages with a fine beach that is dotted with "gommiers" traditional Martinican fishing boats.

Heading south along the coast to Basse-Pointe, visitors should stop to view the enchanting Doll Museum. It's like no other in the world. Housed in an 18th-century colonial mansion on the Leyritz Plantation, the 50 dolls on display are crafted entirely from plants, including their intricate detailed period and contemporary costumes.

The drive along the coast is dotted with spectacular scenic vistas of beaches and villages. Sainte-Marie boasts three interesting attractions, the Saint James Rum Museum, the Saint Jacques Estate Plantation and the Pere Labat Museum. The Rum Museum is set in a stately Créole mansion and traces the history of rum-making from 1765. The free entrance includes a tot of rum.

On the way back to Fort-de-France, stop in at the Balata Garden, a tropical botanical park that has been described as "a garden of delights opening like a gift from the sun and the gentle benevolence of the Antilles".

The south end of the island can be explored in a full day as well. Travelling inland around Fort-de-France Bay, the first stop is Trois-Ilets, the site of the Pagerie Museum where Empress Josephine was born, the Shell Museum and the Sugar Cane Museum.

Before reaching the south coast, visitors can stop for a refreshing swim on the superb beach at Anse d'Arlets, a pretty little fishing village. Standing defiantly all alone in the sea, 4 km off the coast, is Le Diamant (Diamond Rock), a gigantic, 200 meter high boulder that once was used by the British navy as a fortress to attack French trading vessels.

Further along the coast at Sainte-Luce, Carib rock engravings can be observed. One of the most beautiful beaches in the Lesser Antilles lies at Les Salines at the southern tip of the island.

Visitors who experience the beauty and variety of Martinique will quickly come to realize that this tropical shangri-la is truly "Une Histoire d'Amour Entre Ciel et Mer" - a Love Story Between Sky and Sea!

Text: Geoff Deane

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GUADELOUPE

Guadeloupe! A name which transcends two worlds: the earth and the sea. During the day, this beautiful Créole slumbers lazily in the warm tropical sun. During the night, when the air is heavy with the scent of thousands of flowers, she is alive to the beat of her local dance, the biguine, her fare is ripe with exotic flavors and her glass, filled with an elixir for the gods - rum! She makes her bed on the fine golden sand of her beaches and she sings to the music of a melodious language. Guadeloupe is the ultimate seductress. Amongst all of the Caribbean Islands, it is difficult to find one which offers so much variety and so many contrasts.



THE IRRESISTIBLE SMILE OF GUADELOUPE

BASSE-TERRE

From eerie mountains clad in tropical forest to undersea depths, Basse-Terre pays homage to Mother Nature. The Natural Park of Guadeloupe extends over most of this mountainous area. Hiking paths lead to secret waterfalls that rain down into inviting lagoons, now meandering their way underneath the forest canopy or resting a while in the shade of luxuriant ferns.

Dominating this lush landscape, la Soufrière sleeps with one eye open. The volcano awakens once in a long while, as in 1976, but for most of the time, it seems content to groan, belch smoke and fuel caldrons with boiling sulfurous water.

The coral reef is home to a rich and charming array of flora and fauna. It provides a first class scuba diving location. Pigeon Island and the Cousteau Reserve in particular, attract serious divers with an offering of calm and extremely clear waters.

GRANDE-TERRE

While Basse-Terre is wild and mountainous, Grande-Terre has gentle curves, cultivated fields and golden beaches. Ste-Anne's beach is immense, Gosier's tiny St-François' is very popular and Tarare is for nudists.

The tip of the island is a work of art. The relentless pounding of the surf has sculpted phantom castles out of the rocky cliffs hardly visible behind the sea spray. Perhaps they were created by Poseidon himself in the throws of passion for a handsome mermaid. If this area, known as Pointe des Châteaux (Castle Point), was created by the god of the ocean, then there is no doubt the north side of Grande-Terre was created by the mighty Atlantic. No beaches here, just sharp headlands, abrupt cliffs and enormous waves which break against jagged rocks. Children play in the water, braving all this fury from the frailty of the surf boards they improvise out of the trunk of coconut trees.

THE GATEWAY TO GUADELOUPE

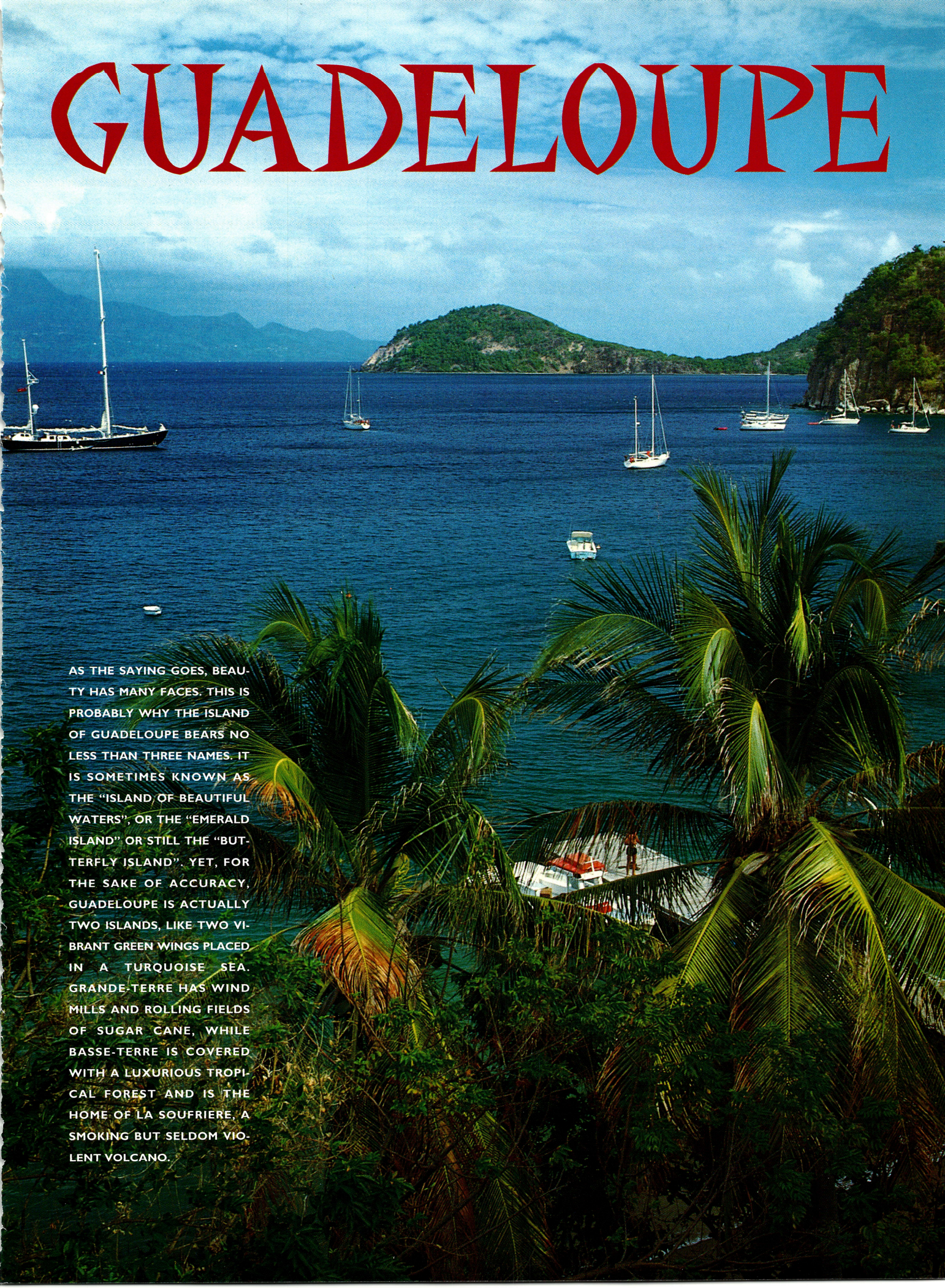
First and foremost, Grande-Terre is home to Pointe-à-Pitre, the economic hub, cultural center and gateway to Guadeloupe, although not its capital. Actually, Pointe-à-Pitre is content to leave this administrative title and responsibility to the city of Basse-Terre, for she is too busy selling spices, resting with abandon in the main square of Place de la Victoire or sipping rum in a street side café.

The market in Pointe-à-Pitre looks like a naïf painting by Douanier Rousseau, with an extraordinary palette of colours and fragrances. The simple stalls are laden with known, and sometimes unknown, exotic produce such as pineapples, coconuts, mangos, caramboles, guavas, yams, chayottes, and plantains. A few stalls away, older women wearing neatly knotted Madras headdresses offer their wares, including "bois bandé", or striped wood, claiming it, most convincingly, to be an aphrodisiac of stunning power.

CRÉOLE COOKING

The cooking of Guadeloupe is a reflection of its people; genuine, without airs or fanfare. Spices from the Orient, vegetables from Europe, combined with the local fruits create a culinary savoir-faire which always translate into a variety of flavors, lasting emotions and a colorful terminology. Créole cooking just doesn't get any better; this is where it originated! Cod fish fritters, eggplant and shrimp appetizers are heavenly and go down like a breeze when accompanied by rum punch. Stuffed crab makes an excellent beginning to a meal, followed by grilled prawn and other regional seafood. The selection of fresh fish is impressive with a predominance of red snapper, tuna, barracuda and shark. Fish is served grilled and accompanied with a number of sauces varying in spiciness. (continued on page 70)

GUADELOUPE



AS THE SAYING GOES, BEAUTY HAS MANY FACES. THIS IS PROBABLY WHY THE ISLAND OF GUADELOUPE BEARS NO LESS THAN THREE NAMES. IT IS SOMETIMES KNOWN AS THE "ISLAND OF BEAUTIFUL WATERS", OR THE "EMERALD ISLAND" OR STILL THE "BUTTERFLY ISLAND". YET, FOR THE SAKE OF ACCURACY, GUADELOUPE IS ACTUALLY TWO ISLANDS, LIKE TWO VIBRANT GREEN WINGS PLACED IN A TURQUOISE SEA. GRANDE-TERRE HAS WIND MILLS AND ROLLING FIELDS OF SUGAR CANE, WHILE BASSE-TERRE IS COVERED WITH A LUXURIOUS TROPICAL FOREST AND IS THE HOME OF LA SOUFRIERE, A SMOKING BUT SELDOM VIOLENT VOLCANO.

Colombo, whether made from chicken, lamb or pork, is Indian curry prepared the Caribbean way. And do keep an eye out for those cute little hot peppers, as they are found in some of the local dishes and have been known to rattle quite a few unprepared gourmands.

Créole cuisine is celebrated during the month of August, when the colorful Fête des Cuisinières is held. Wearing local dresses and bedecked in their finest jewelry, the island's Cordons Bleus are celebrated with a parade and banquet, punctuated with dancing. Time to begin the "biguine"!



MARKETS ARE ALWAYS COLORFUL

PLANTER'S OR TI'PUNCH

It is with a glass of rum in hand that one begins to appreciate and discover the true spirit of Guadeloupe. Fruit of the sugar cane and by way of consequence of slavery, rum, whether white or old is the very essence of joie de vivre in the island. White rum, having lost its bite and developed its perfume in stainless steel vats works best in cocktails such as Planter's Punch, made with the addition of fruit juice. Ti'Punch is a careful and powerful blend of pure sugar cane syrup and white rum. Old rum, aged in oak casks, is a fruity spirit with an incomparable finesse and bouquet. It must be consumed neat and at the end of a fine dinner, much as in the way a digestif would be drunk. The local history has been shaped by the sugar cane. The Rum Museum in Ste-Rose relates this passionate and colorful history readily associated with pirates, buccaneers and other awe-inspiring adventurers.

MARIE-GALANTE, LES SAINTES, LA DÉSIRADE...

Guadeloupe is also an archipelago composed of tiny, jewel-like islands scattered in the sea. Marie-Galante, which owes its name to one of the boats in Christopher Columbus' armada, is as round as the dot on an "i". Alone and seemingly isolated, this island lives on the fringe of time. Here, sugar cane fields sway in the breeze, ox-driven carts leisurely bring the harvest to the distillery and brightly colored fishing boats line up neatly inside the harbours.

Nine islands make up the group known as Les Saintes. Tranquil beaches with crystal clear water, Napoleon's fort, tiny pastel-colored houses, children with coffee-colored skin and bright blue eyes, all contribute to this microcosm of much beauty and charm.

At first glance, it would seem that Mother Nature was less generous with the island of La Désirade, though this is not the case. You'll have to look a little harder, that's all. For one, there is unique vegetation, including wild orchids, cacti and cinnamon wood.

...SAINT-MARTIN, ST-BARTHÉLÉMY

To the north, the islands of St-Martin and St-Barthélémy are truly cosmopolitan. Tourism is big business and their shores are lined with large hotels and duty-free shops. Majestic cruise ships and elegant yachts regularly cast anchor in their waters. Yet, those who seek a quieter time will easily find a beach tailor-made to their fancy or a small restaurant where Créole cooking will taste like nowhere else.



VISIT TO THE ISLANDS OF LES SAINTES

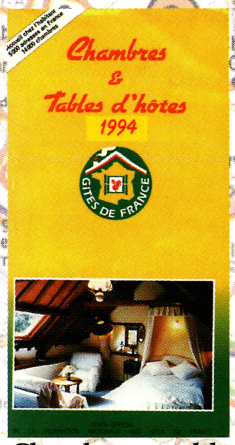


VIEW FROM LES SAINTES

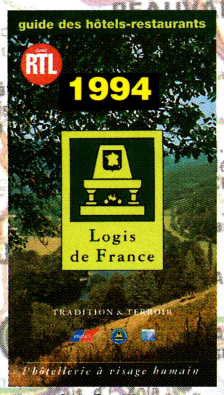


CYCLING TO THE RELAIS DU MOULIN

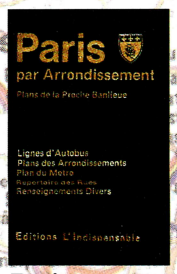
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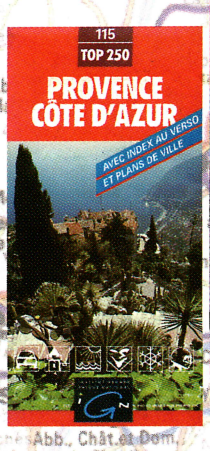
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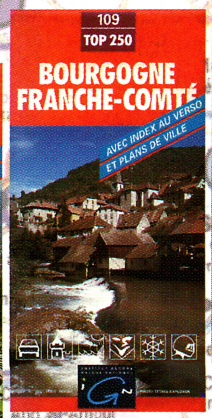


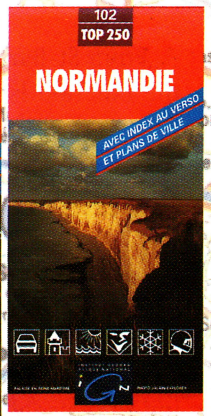
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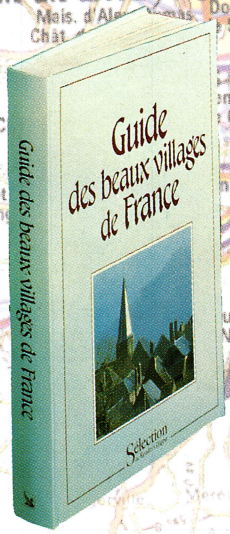
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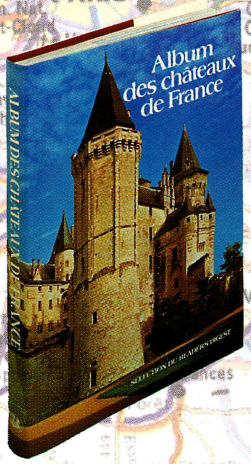




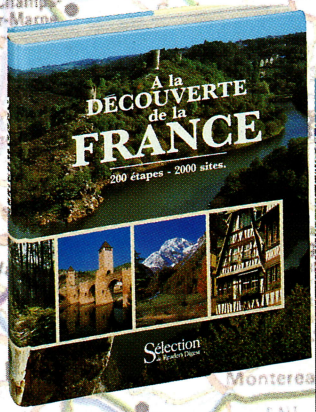
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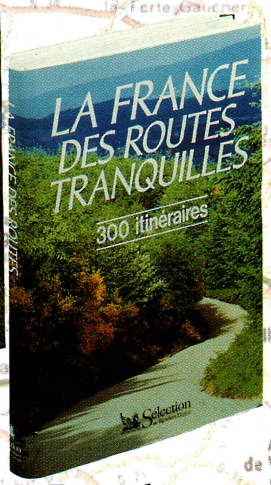
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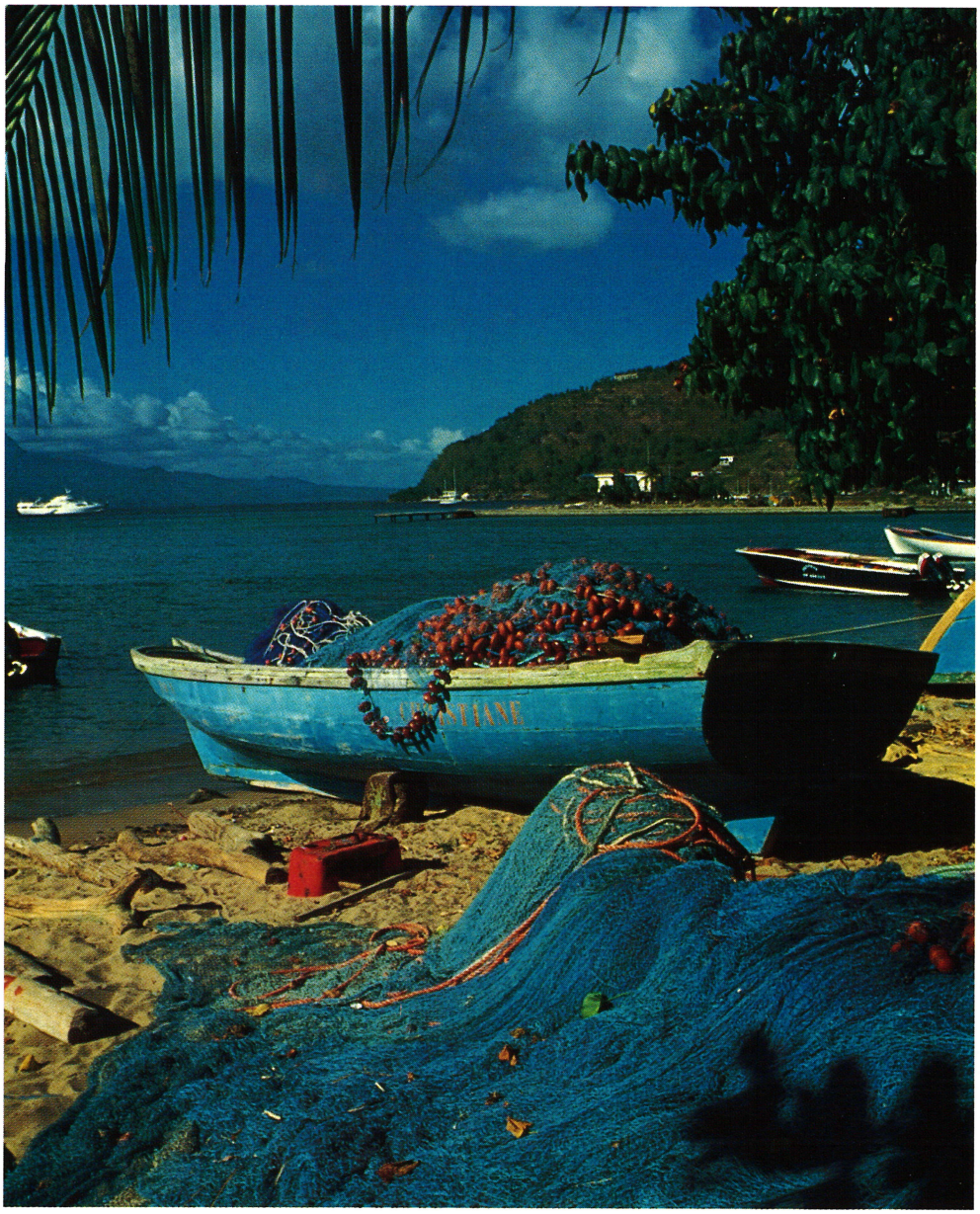
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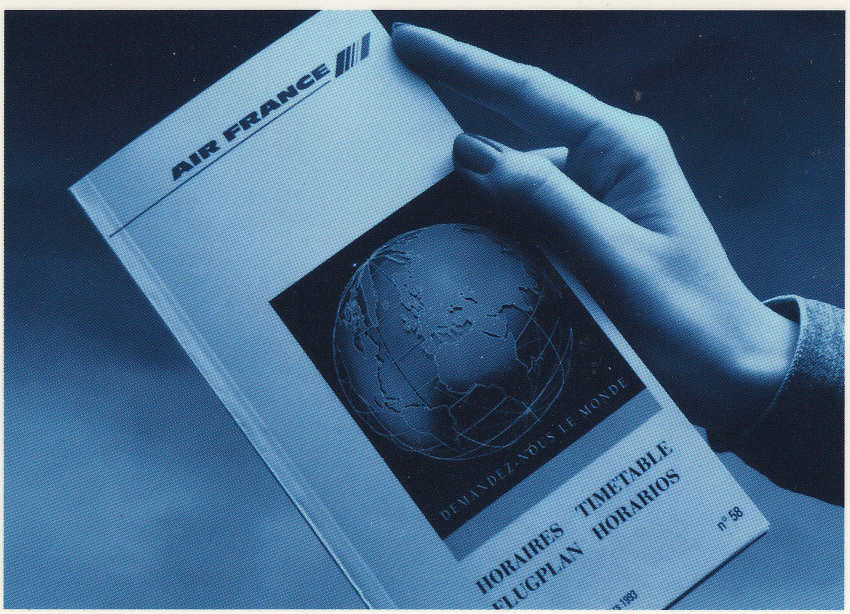


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